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ABSTRACT

Thirteen charter schools were opened for the first time in New Jersey in 1997, and 23 new charter schools were approved for the following year. This study, prepared for the New Jersey Institute for School Innovation, provides information on the experience of the first year of charter schools' operation, the results of which may be useful in shaping policy and practice. The goal was to capture the responses to charter schools, both inside and outside the schools, and to show which challenges have to be met for the movement to succeed. To learn about the benefits and challenges of charter schools, interviews, site-visits, and survey research were employed. More than 200 people and all 13 charter schools and 9 local school districts participated in the interviews. With this information in mind, the study attempted to answer the following questions: (1) How are charter schools different from other public schools in New Jersey? (2) What are the attitudes, opinions, and experiences of those involved? (3) What issues and concerns have emerged after the first year? and (4) What have charter school constituents learned that may prove helpful for other founders of charter schools. Five appendixes include history of the charter school concept, interview protocols, site visit protocols, demographic survey, and research staff. (JMD)

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New Jersey Charter Schools: *the first year*

ELYSIAN CHARTER SCHOOL • GALLOWAY KINDERGARTEN CHARTER SCHOOL • GATEWAY CHARTER SCHOOL
JERSEY CITY COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL • LEAP ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL • THE LEARNING COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL
NORTH STAR ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL • PRINCETON CHARTER SCHOOL • ROBERT TREAT ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL
SAMUEL D. PROCTOR ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL • SOARING HEIGHTS CHARTER SCHOOL
SUSSEX COUNTY CHARTER SCHOOL FOR TECHNOLOGY • TRENTON COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL

1997-1998

Prepared for the New Jersey
Institute for School Innovation

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9 June 1998

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Preface

1997-1998 marks the first year that charter schools are in operation in New Jersey. Nationally, the number of charter schools grew from one school in Minnesota in 1992 to over 786 schools in 33 states in the spring of 1998.[1] Thirteen of those schools opened their doors to New Jersey children only nine months ago. For next year, 23 new charter schools have been approved. Designed to push educational reform, the arrival of charter schools has stirred as much controversy as it has awakened hope for improving the quality of education in the State.

Citizens, policy makers, educators and parents of school age children deserve to know more about this growing movement. This study – which was designed, conducted, analyzed, and written in the course of four months – is an attempt to provide timely information on the experience of the first year of charter schools' operation in New Jersey, so that the results may be useful in shaping policy and practice. The goal of the study is to capture the response to charter schools, both inside and outside of the schools, and to suggest the challenges that have to be met for the movement to succeed.

To help in this effort, almost 200 people gave their time to respond to lengthy surveys. We owe thanks to the teachers, administrators, students, parents, founders and trustees, district office personnel, union leaders, and school board members who generously shared their time and perceptions with us. The research team was impressed with the thoughtfulness and dedication of respondents and their willingness to engage in discussions on schooling. We are also grateful to: Joe Nathan, the Director of the Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, whose earlier research on charter schools informed our study; to Professor Robert Crain of Teachers College, Columbia University for his research guidance; to Sarah Tantillo of the New Jersey Charter School Resource Center for assisting us in gaining access to the schools; and to Mary Lee Fitzgerald and the New Jersey Institute for School Innovation for giving us the opportunity to conduct the study.

1 The Center for Educational Reform

Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

In January of 1996, Governor Christie Whitman signed the New Jersey Charter School Program Act (L. 1995, c. 426, N.J.S.A. 18A: 36A), which approved the operation of charter schools in the state and invited interested parties to apply for charter school status. In 1997, 13 charter schools opened their doors to 1344 students in nine districts throughout New Jersey. Twenty-three new charter school applications have been approved for 1998.

The aim of this study is to tell the story of New Jersey charter schools' first year of operation from the perspective of stakeholders. The purpose is to provide useful information to assist policy makers in the New Jersey State Legislature, educators in the process of founding or improving charter schools, and citizens of New Jersey interested in issues of school reform or choice.

THE EVALUATION METHOD

During the initial months of operation, the best way to learn about charter schools – their benefits, challenges and drawbacks – is to survey people who are affected by the schools. To achieve this, the research team employed interviews, site-visits, and survey research.

Interviews were conducted in person or by telephone, with a representative sample of parents, students, teachers, directors, founders and trustees who are directly associated with charter schools, and district superintendents, presidents of the board of education, leaders of parent teacher organizations, and union leaders who work in the districts in which the charter schools are located. Over 200 people were interviewed, and all 13 charter schools and nine local school districts participated, although the sample is limited in that one of the 13 schools chose not to allow students to participate in interviews, and two of the 13 schools did not supply parent lists, which precluded interviewing parents of children attending these schools.

This report also reflects a total of 65 hours of site-observations as well as self-reported survey data gathered from the charter schools.

The study attempts to answer the following four questions:

1. How are charter schools different from other public schools in New Jersey?
2. What are the attitudes, opinions and experiences of those involved with or affected by New Jersey charter schools – both within the schools and in the local school district?
3. What issues and concerns have emerged during the first year of charter schools' operation in New Jersey?
4. What lessons have charter school constituents learned that would be helpful for others founding charter schools?

1. DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF CHARTER SCHOOLS: HOW ARE CHARTER SCHOOLS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN NEW JERSEY?

Charter schools were intended to be different by design. As autonomous public schools they not only have features that distinguish them from most public schools, they also differ dramatically from one another. Nonetheless, some or many charter schools share certain characteristics. This study draws a distinction between structural design features – those aspects of a school's plan dedicated to effectively delivering an education; and stakeholder design feature – those aspects of a school's plan dedicated to creating and strengthening personal connections to the school.

Structural Design Features

- Small school size, averaging 103 students, with a commitment to remaining relatively small even as they add grades in the future.
- Small class size, ranging from eight to 20 students, with an average student to teacher ratio of 9:1.
- Partnership arrangements with universities, philanthropies, and other non-profit organizations.
- Longer school day than the average: two schools extend academics until 5:00 p.m., two schools offer full-day kindergarten and one school is residential.
- Longer academic calendar with three schools extending into the summer, and several conducting professional development during the summer months.
- Daily school-wide meetings in four schools that are intended to build cohesive communities.
- School uniforms required for students in four schools.
- Site-based governance with an emphasis on parental and community membership.
- Administrative and support staff is minimal.
- Mission and goals intended to drive curriculum decisions and assessment.
- Student selection via lottery.

Stakeholder Design Features

- Teachers are actively involved in curriculum design and in shaping policy; about half of all teachers are involved in hiring decisions.
- Directors work with teachers to develop curriculum and over half teach classes.
- Almost all directors and teachers put in long hours and assume multiple roles and duties in the school.
- With one exception, charter schools are not unionized.
- Over half of all parents report volunteering their time to work in the school or serve on committees.

2. WHAT ARE THE ATTITUDES, OPINIONS, AND EXPERIENCES OF THOSE INVOLVED WITH OR AFFECTED BY NEW JERSEY CHARTER SCHOOLS - BOTH WITHIN THE SCHOOLS AND IN THE SCHOOL DISTRICT?

The majority of interviewed constituents directly affiliated with charter schools report favorable outcomes:

- 90 percent of parents say that the school is working for their child as evidenced by their child's interest in and enthusiasm for school and social and academic growth.
- Students in grades five or above who were interviewed, believe that teachers give them more attention and put more effort into helping them than in their previous school.
- Teachers work long hours, approximately ten hours a day, but value the academic intimacy of charter schools and the opportunity to plan and design the curriculum.
- Directors cite inordinate time demands and the absence of support staff, but enjoy the advantages of close connections with parents, working with a faculty that shares a common educational philosophy and the opportunity for innovation.
- Founders value student academic success, positive attitudes toward learning and a high level of parent involvement.
- Most trustees report excellent relationships with school directors.

Those interviewed who are indirectly affiliated with charter schools report a mixed reaction:

- Superintendents and board presidents say that the most significant influence of charter schools is the loss of funding for the district.
- Most union representatives believe charter schools offer something different such as small class size and freedom from bureaucracy, but are concerned about the democratic principals of equity and access for students.
- Parent teacher organization leaders say that charter schools offer parents the advantage of choice but create tension in the community.

3. WHAT ISSUES AND CONCERNS HAVE EMERGED DURING THE FIRST YEAR OF OPERATION OF NEW JERSEY CHARTER SCHOOLS?

One of the purposes of the study is to identify problems that arose in the implementation of the Charter School Program Act. Survey responses were tabulated to reveal issues of concern and then cross-tabulated across constituent groups to identify common tendencies. The findings were supported by on-site observations of the schools and supplemented by demographic data supplied by the schools. The major issues identified include:

Funding

- Charter schools complain about under-funding as most receive 90 percent of the local district's per-pupil allocation.
- Districts object to the mechanism for funding, citing an undue financial drain on their operating budget.
- Outside constituents believe that charter schools are attracting new students into the local district that haven't been budgeted for – most notably parochial school students.
- Charter schools and the local districts agree that the funding mechanism for charter schools should be changed. Charter schools hope to alleviate under-funding, and district schools hope to abate the flow of funds from their operating budget to the charter schools.

Facilities

- Charter schools' facility costs must come out of operating budgets, thereby limiting charter school options.
- Over a third of all charter schools are located in temporary facilities or are obliged to share space with other organizations. Many charter schools complain of a lack of adequate space for instruction, libraries, or gymnasiums.

Special Education

- Responsibility and funding for child study team evaluations appears to fall on charter schools, but few schools had policies in place for special education referrals.
- Only child-study teams with district administrators are authorized by the federal government to write Individual Educational Plans (IEP) for special needs students. Thus, charter schools have had to negotiate with local districts to get their services.

Accountability

- Specific mechanisms for charter school oversight are unclear. Directors are not sure of exactly who will hold them accountable and how.
- Superintendents and union representatives are concerned about a lack of public accountability and oversight.

Bureaucracy

- Charter schools enjoy a comparatively large degree of autonomy in directing their internal affairs, but complain about encroaching bureaucratic restraint and government micromanagement.

Assessment

- School superintendents and district union representatives want schools to be assessed exactly the way other public schools are assessed: through standardized tests and demographic measures such as attendance, dropout rates, and graduation rates.
- Charter school personnel want testing to be predicated on improvement against baseline data rather than average test scores. They also suggest multiple assessment approaches to capture the unique features of the school such as observations, attitudinal surveys, student portfolios, and counting parent volunteer hours.

4. WHAT LESSONS HAVE CHARTER SCHOOL CONSTITUENTS LEARNED THAT WOULD BE HELPFUL FOR OTHERS FOUNDING CHARTER SCHOOLS?

One of the purposes of the study is to gather and publish the early lessons that charter school founders, directors, teachers and trustees have learned in their first year of operation in New Jersey during three distinct phases: the application phase, which we defined as the time prior to acceptance; the start-up phase, which we defined as the time between acceptance and the first day of school; and the operation phase, which we defined as the time after the opening day. What follows is a synthesis of our findings:

Application Process

- Set realistic deadlines with ample time for unexpected delays.
- Build relationships with the community and the local school district.
- Start looking for a building site immediately.
- Recruit board members with a range of talents who are willing to work hard.

Start-Up

- Rely on teamwork, as one person simply can't do it alone.
- Develop written policies and procedures.
- Begin ordering supplies immediately.
- Be knowledgeable about the needs and culture of the children you are serving.
- Explore options for different service providers.
- Market the student lottery through advertisements and presentations in the local district schools.
- Hire or recruit the following professionals:
    - Grant writer
    - CPA or business consultant to help with the lottery, budgeting, and accounting
    - Legal counsel
    - Educational expert for staff and curriculum development

Operation

- Staffing the Director Position:
  - Hire a director as soon as possible. Look for high-energy person who is both a self-starter and someone who can realize the mission and shape the culture of the school.
- Staffing the Faculty:
  - Make sure that the teacher's philosophy of education is in agreement with the school's philosophy and mission.
  - Find teachers who are committed to teaching the school population being served. Make job demands, including time commitment, clear.
  - Hire teachers who are flexible, open to innovation, and comfortable with ambiguity.
  - Involve parents in the hiring process.
- Professional Development:
  - Provide staff development before school starts and regularly throughout the year.
- Parents
  - Clearly define the role of parents in the school.
  - Recognize parents as a vital constituency.
  - Communicate with parents often and openly.
  - Make good use of parent volunteers.
  - Invite parents and students to meet with you before school officially opens to establish ownership.
- School Community
  - Maintain relationships with the school district.
  - Communicate openly to those with whom you share facilities.

A FINAL WORD

Future studies should seek comprehensive measures of results, both quantitative and qualitative, which become appropriate after a longer period of operation. Assessments should also consider the degree to which individual schools are achieving their mission and goals. For comparative purposes, the State may want to commission a study of students attending charter schools and those attending district schools who applied to charter schools but were not selected in the lottery.

The results of charter schools should be considered as a whole. The charter school movement should not be celebrated with one or two schools that stand out as shining stars, nor should it be damned by one or two abysmal disappointments. Beyond the constituents of the schools, success or failure needs to be measured, in part, by the impact of charter schools on the wider educational system. Charter schools touch the core of our nation's most pressing problems of equity and excellence – issues that warrant our most thoughtful consideration.

Introduction

CONTEXT OF STUDY

At the close of her State-of-the-State address on January 11, 1996, Governor Christie Whitman signed the Charter School Program Act (L. 1995, c. 426, N.J.S.A. 18A: 36A) into law. Arguing that the establishment of charter schools would stimulate reform in the public school system, the Governor said that charter schools are "exactly the sort of fundamental change we need." The Department of Education soon received 37 charter applications, 18 of which were approved. Of these, two applications were later rescinded and three approved schools opted to take an additional year to plan their operation. In September of 1997, the remaining 13 charter schools opened throughout the state.*

A New Jersey charter school is a public school that operates independently of the local board of education under a charter granted by the Commissioner of Education. Once the charter is approved and established, the school becomes a body politic with all the powers necessary to carry out its charter program. A charter school can be established by either a group of teaching staff members (principals, supervisors, teachers and superintendents), parents of children attending the schools of the local district, or a combination of teaching staff members and parents. In addition, an institution of higher education or a private entity located within the state can join with teaching staff members and parents with children attending the schools of the district to establish a charter school.[1]

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the start-up phase and initial progress of the 13 charter schools that opened in New Jersey as a result of the Charter School Program Act. To this end, the study examines the initial assumptions that guided the Act, namely that:

> The establishment of charter schools as part of this State's program of education can assist in promoting comprehensive educational reform by providing a mechanism for the implementation of a variety of educational approaches which may not be available in the traditional public school classroom. Specifically, charter schools offer the potential to improve pupil learning; increase for students the educational choices available when selecting the learning environment they feel may be most appropriate; encourage the use of different and innovative learning methods; establish a new form of accountability for schools; require the measure of learning outcomes; make the school the unit for educational improvement; and establish new professional opportunities for teachers.[2]

The initial findings of this report should be useful to:

- The 13 charter schools that participated in this study.
- The New Jersey State Legislature and other policymakers interested in assessing early results of the Charter School Program Act.
- Educators in the process of setting up charter schools for the fall of 1998.
- Citizens of New Jersey.

* Comprehensive histories of both the charter school concept and New Jersey charter schools are included in Appendix A.

1 New Jersey Department of Education, 1997-98 Charter School Application.

2 New Jersey Charter School Program Act (L. 1995, c. 426, N.J.S.A. 18A: 36A).

Evaluation Method

This study is both qualitative and quantitative in nature, and employed a literature review, structured interviews, on-site observations and demographic surveys.

QUESTIONS OF INTEREST

This study is predicated on four questions of interest that address the underlying premise of the charter school act, and serve to evaluate the start-up phase and initial progress of the 13 charter schools that opened in New Jersey in 1997. These questions are:

1. How are charter schools different from other public schools in New Jersey?
2. What are the attitudes, opinions and experiences of those involved with or affected by New Jersey charter schools – both within the school and in the local school district?
3. What issues and concerns have emerged during the first year of charter schools' operation in New Jersey?
4. What lessons have charter school constituents learned that would be helpful for others founding charter schools?

POPULATION OF INTEREST

The 13 schools included in this study, listed along with their local educational districts, are:

Elysian Charter School (Hoboken School District)

Galloway Kindergarten Charter School (Galloway School District)

Gateway Charter School (Jersey City School District)

Jersey City Community Charter School (Jersey City School District)

LEAP Academy Charter School (Camden School District)

The Learning Community Charter School (Jersey City School District)

North Star Academy Charter School (Newark School District)

Princeton Charter School (Princeton Regional School District)

Robert Treat Academy Charter School (Newark School District)

Samuel D. Proctor Academy Charter School (Ewing Township School District)

Soaring Heights Charter School (Jersey City School District)

Sussex County Charter School for Technology (Sparta County School District)

Trenton Community Charter School (Trenton School District)

DATA COLLECTION

The study seeks to provide a representative sample of the attitudes, opinions and experiences of those affected by the Charter School Program Act. To accomplish this, a question protocol was developed to guide the interviews of each charter school constituency, as well as members of the local school district. The data presented in this report reflects the interview responses of:

- 26 Students enrolled in charter schools.
- 51 Parents with children enrolled in charter schools.
- 39 Teachers employed by charter schools.
- 14 Directors or co-directors of charter schools.
- 10 Founders or co-founders of charter schools.
- 8 Trustees of governing charter school boards.
- 9 Local educational agency superintendents, or their representatives, who have a charter school located in their district.
- 7 Teachers union representatives from local educational districts that have at least one charter school located in the district.
- 5 Parent-teacher organization (PTO) presidents from local educational districts that have at least one charter school located in the district.
- 4 School board presidents from local educational districts that have at least one charter school located in the district.

Interviews were conducted either in-person or via telephone, depending on the availability of the interview subject. Students interviewed were limited to grade five and above. The interview protocols contained a mix of close-ended and open-ended questions, with five questions replicated across all constituent groups. After data collection was completed, responses were tabulated to reveal central tendencies within and across constituent groups.

All 13 schools participated in the study and all nine local educational districts responded to requests for interviews, although not all interview subjects were available or willing to participate in the study. As these schools were only in operation for seven months prior to data collection, it was too early to determine their effectiveness regarding student achievement. While this is desirable data, and should be included in subsequent evaluations, the research group determined that it could not be gauged with any degree of confidence. A copy of the interview protocol is included in Appendix B.

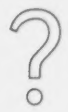
Each school in the report was visited at least once by a team of two or three researchers. The site visit consisted of a school site observation protocol and a classroom observation protocol. Both protocols took the form of focused questionnaires for observation and were developed by the research group prior to the site visits. These observations were not designed, intended, or used as comparative studies between the charter schools, or between charter schools and their neighborhood public schools, but were designed to inform and validate data collected from interviews. School site observations were compiled collectively with data from each member's field notes. At least three hours of classroom observations were recorded by individual observers. The representative observational data in this report reflects a total of 36 hours of school site observations. Copies of the school site protocol and the classroom protocol are included in Appendix C.

A demographic survey was mailed to each school that mirrored questions from the New Jersey Schools Report Card, the primary means of assessment for New Jersey Public Schools. This survey sought quantifiable data pertaining to students, faculty, and funding. A copy of the demographic survey is included in Appendix D.

The evaluation team reviewed the Charter School Program Act, charter applications, charter contracts, national charter school studies, State charter school studies, and local press coverage of the New Jersey charter schools.

The research staff was comprised of a professor in the field of organizational analysis and research, as well as advanced graduate students, all of whom are experienced teachers. A short biography of each team member is included in Appendix E.

School Characteristics



HOW ARE CHARTER SCHOOLS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN NEW JERSEY?

One intention of the New Jersey Charter School Program Act is to provide a mechanism for the implementation of a variety of educational approaches which may not be available in the traditional public school classroom. We found distinct school characteristics among the 13 charter schools. Most of these are by design, such as school and class size, the extension of the school calendar to include study during the summer, and parent involvement. Other features that have shaped charter schools' characteristics may be unintentional – a result of limited resource rather than deliberate planning. For example, philosophically most schools have put priorities on small classes and choose to hire teachers over administrative or support staff. The result is that lean staffing compels teachers and administrators to assume multiple roles. Some of these roles are welcome, while others are a burden.

Some of the school characteristics are a result of both intentional and unintentional consequences. For example, by law each charter school must have its own governing body, a board of trustees responsible for oversight of the school. In most charter schools – particularly during this first year – the board's active involvement in the organizational aspects of school life has been a necessity. Thus, in making decisions, board members are likely to understand the needs and realities of school life, an outcome that seems to work in the school's favor.

Parent involvement is another example of both intentional and unintentional consequences. Most schools, by design, include parents in the educational life of their child and the school, but the absence of support staff has made parent involvement a necessity rather than a luxury. From serving lunch to answering telephones to assisting in the classroom, parents are needed to help run the school.

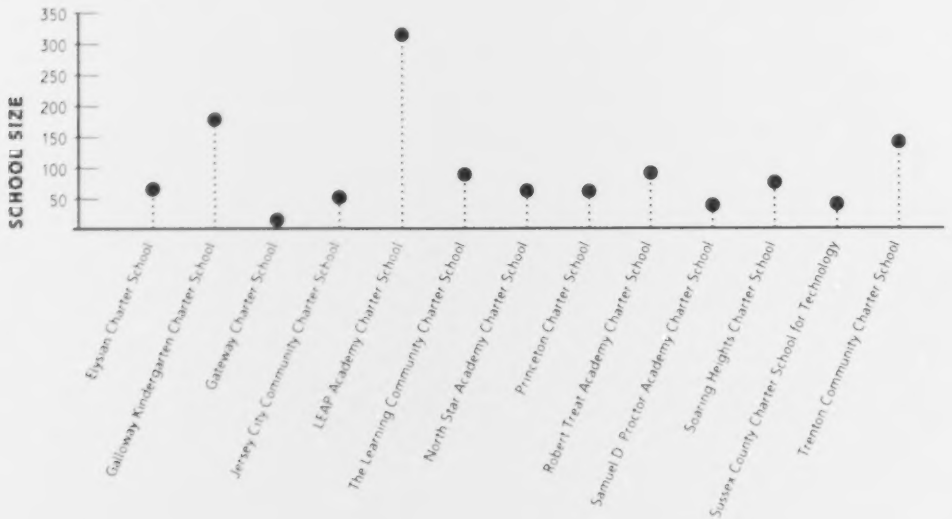
Whether by intention or happenstance, features that arise this first year are likely to shape an enduring school culture. This study draws a distinction between structural design features – those aspects of a school's plan dedicated to effectively delivering an education; and stakeholder design feature – those aspects of a school's plan dedicated to creating and strengthening personal connections to the school. In this section, we describe distinctive aspects of the 13 charter schools by looking at structural features and characteristics of stakeholders.

STRUCTURAL DESIGN FEATURES

Small school size

Charter schools report a total of 1344 students enrolled, with an average enrollment of 103 students, and a range of 24 to 324 students. All charter schools plan to expand, yet are committed to remaining relatively small (figure 1).

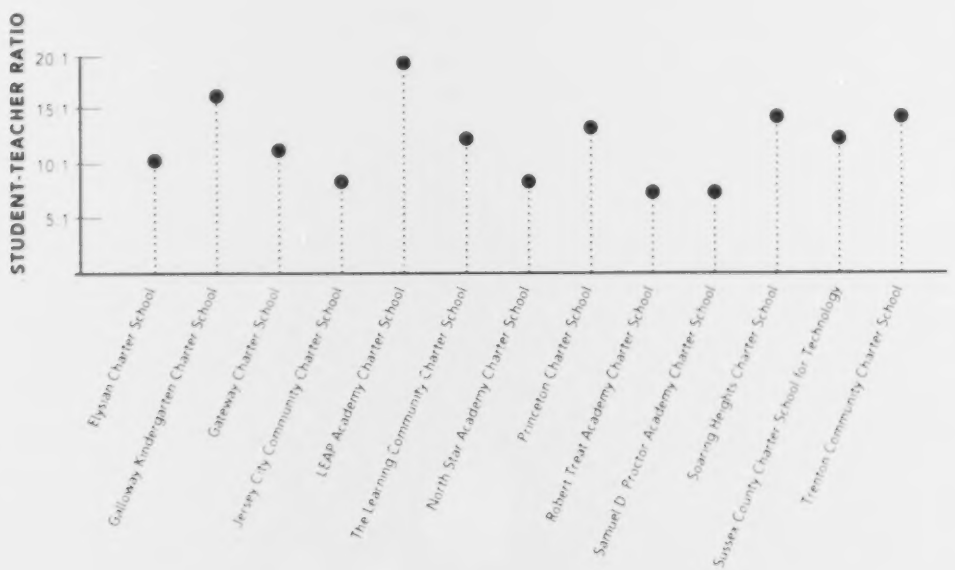
fig. 1



Low Student to teacher ratio

Charter schools report an average student to teacher ratio of 9:1, with a class size ranging from 8 to 20 students (figure 2).

fig. 2



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STRUCTURAL DESIGN FEATURES (CONT.)

Partnerships

Most Charter schools have partnership arrangement with a university, philanthropy, or other non-profit organization. Some schools use these partnerships as satellite learning centers (figure 3).

Figure 3: Charter School Partnerships

Elysian Charter School	Mile Square Families, Inc.
Galloway Kindergarten Charter School	Church of St. Mark and All Saints
Gateway Charter School	The Occupational Center of Hudson County
Jersey City Community Charter School	Urban League of Hudson County
LEAP Academy Charter School	Rutgers University
The Learning Community Charter School	St. Peter's College
North Star Academy Charter School	The WKBJ Foundation; New Community Group; Newark Museum
Princeton Charter School	None
Robert Treat Academy Charter School	North Ward Center, Inc.
Samuel D. Proctor Academy Charter School	Children's Academy for Achievement
Soaring Heights Charter School	Institute for Urban Education, St. Peter's College
Sussex County Charter School for Technology	Sussex County Technical School
Trenton Community Charter School	Young Scholars Institute

Grade levels

The majority of charter schools have chosen to serve elementary students (figure 4).

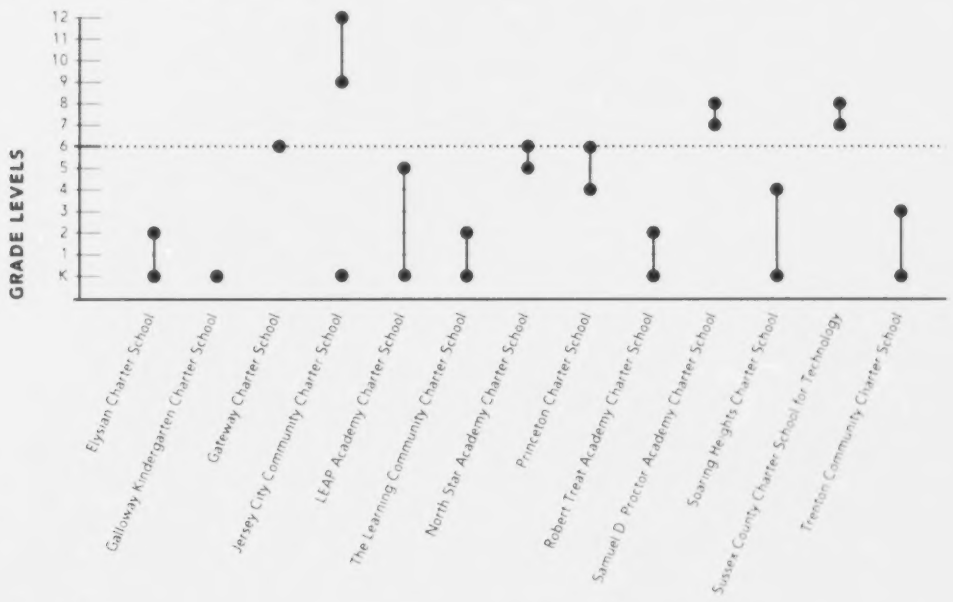

fig. 4

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STRUCTURAL DESIGN FEATURES (CONT.)

Longer school day
Four charter schools report offering an academic day that is longer than the average public school day. Of these, two offer a full-day kindergarten in districts where this option would be otherwise unavailable; one school is a residential boarding school; and two schools extend their academic day to 5:00 p.m.

Length of year
Three charter schools offer an academic year that is one month longer than the average public school year. These three schools extend their educational program into the summer.

Uniforms
Four charter schools require uniforms, which vary from green blazers and blue slacks at one school, to white polo shirts and khaki pants at another.

Site-based governance
Each school is governed by a board of trustees responsible for financial oversight, guiding the director, and setting strategic policy. Charter school governance reflects an emphasis on parental membership and community involvement.

Mission and goals
All charter schools are mission driven. Each school has a well-defined purpose and specific goals that are intended to drive curriculum and assessment.

Lottery
Charter schools are required to select students by random lottery, and actively market their schools. In 1997-98, 1915 students applied for admission to New Jersey charter schools, and all but one school held a lottery.

STAKEHOLDER DESIGN FEATURES

Control over the teaching and learning process
The majority of teachers in charter schools are actively involved in curriculum development and in the formulation of school policy. Almost half of all teachers are involved in hiring decisions.

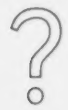
Daily school-wide meeting
Four charter schools have daily school-wide meetings that emphasize community building among students and faculty.

Non-Unionized Faculty
Most charter school staff have chosen not to establish or belong to a collective bargaining unit such as a teachers union. Only one school is unionized.

Directors are actively involved with curriculum and instruction
Charter school directors work with teachers to develop curriculum, and half of them teach classes in addition to their administrative duties.

Parental Involvement
Parents play an active role in their child's learning. They also attend parent meetings and serve as volunteers in the operation, instruction, and fundraising of the school. More than half of all schools ask parents to sign a contract that commits them to being active partners in their child's learning.

Attitudes



WHAT ARE THE ATTITUDES, OPINIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF THOSE INVOLVED WITH OR AFFECTED BY NEW JERSEY CHARTER SCHOOLS – BOTH WITHIN THE SCHOOL AND IN THE LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT?

During the initial months of operation, the best way to learn about charter schools, their benefits, challenges, and drawbacks, is to ask the people who are affected by the schools. We surveyed 11 different constituents to gauge their perspectives on charter schools – six constituents directly associated with charter schools and five constituents who are indirectly involved with charter schools. Most respondents were asked five general questions, including what they liked and disliked about charter schools, the advantages and disadvantages of charter schools, and what they would change about charter schools. Additionally, each constituent was asked specific questions relevant to their professional role and association with charter schools. All professionals, for example, were asked what they would like to tell the New Jersey Legislature about charter schools.

Responses were tabulated for each constituent. To insure reliability in interpretation, at least two different people analyzed and interpreted the results. In the section following we tell the story of charter schools by reporting the most salient responses.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHARTER SCHOOLS: *Internal Constituents*

The six constituents surveyed within charter schools include: parents, students, teachers, directors, founders, and trustees.

Parents with Children Enrolled in Charter Schools

Telephone interviews were conducted with 51 parents from 11 of the 13 charter schools. Using a computer generated random number table, an attempt was made to reach the mother, father, or guardian living in the household with the child attending the charter school. Two charter schools did not supply parent lists and are not represented in the parent sample. The findings include the following:

- Small size, individual attention, the rigor of the academic program, and innovative approaches are reasons parents cite for enrolling their child in charter schools.
- 72% of students attended public schools last year, 16% were too young to attend school, 12% attended parochial school and 1% attended an independent school.
- Parents learned about charter schools through word of mouth, newspapers, or recruiters from the charter school.
- Parents appear to be less concerned and less interested in the specific mission of the school than they are in the advantages of teacher dedication, academic rigor, and the personal attention their child receives in the school.
- Ninety percent of parents said the school was working for their child, as evidenced by enthusiasm, interest, and social and academic growth; 8% were not sure that the school was benefiting their child and only two parents (4%) said the school was not working for their child.
- All parents say they attend parent-teacher association meetings and over half of all parents report volunteering their time to work in the school or to serve on school committees.

Students Enrolled in Charter Schools

A random selection process was used to conduct personal on-site interviews with 26 students in the six schools that included grade six or above. One school that qualified chose not to participate, and another school preferred group discussion to individual student interviews. Twelve students were interviewed at that school. For the tabulated totals, the 12 student answers were compressed into three representatives so as not to skew the sample, leaving a tabulated total of 17 student interviews. The findings include the following:

- Nearly half of the students interviewed indicated that they chose charter schools because of the academic programs, which they perceived as being stronger than the previous schools they attended.
- Eleven of 17 students believe that teachers in the charter school give more attention to individual student needs and demand a higher level of academic work than in the public school they previously attended.
- Twelve of 17 students said that the charter school is better than their previous school because teachers put more effort into helping students.
- Most students objected to increased work demands and a longer school day in comparison to the school they previously attended.
- The average time spent on homework is 1 1/2 hours a night, although students reported a range of 15 minutes to 3 1/2 hours.

Teachers in Charter Schools

Three teachers were interviewed at each school: one teacher with the least years of teaching experience, one teacher with the most years of teaching experience, and a teacher at the schools whose level of experience fell in between the two. Personal on-site interviews were conducted with three teachers in each of the 13 schools. A complete sample of 39 teachers was interviewed.
The findings include the following:

- Teachers indicated that major advantages to working in a charter school are being involved in decisions about the teaching learning process and the opportunity for professional growth.
- Teachers report that the major disadvantage to working in a charter school is a lack of support staff.
- Charter school teachers report working an average of nine hours a day in school, approximately one hour at home on weeknights and three hours on weekends.
- Over three-fourths of all teachers are involved in curriculum development and setting policies for the school, and about half of all teachers are involved in hiring decisions.
- Teachers value the opportunity to plan and design curriculum and the academic intimacy which charter schools provide.

Directors of Charter Schools

Personal on-site interviews were conducted with each of the 13 chief school administrators in the charter schools who are called by a variety of titles including director, principal, lead or master teacher, and headmaster. Since the term "director" was most prevalent, we use that title. The findings include the following:

- The professional advantages of working in charter schools include close connections with parents, working with a faculty that shares a common educational philosophy, the opportunity for flexibility and innovation, and the lack of bureaucracy
- Inordinate time demands and the lack of support staff are the major disadvantages to working in charter schools.
- Directors report a lack of internal bureaucracy when working with their boards to implement practices and programs. However, directors note that bureaucratic demands from the local school district and State Board of Education are a burden because they lack support staff.

Founders of Charter Schools

We attempted to identify and interview the person primarily responsible for founding the school. In two instances where the founder was currently serving as the director, another person involved in founding the school was interviewed. Founders of ten of the 13 charter schools were interviewed in person or by telephone. The findings include the following:

- The motivation for founding a school was dissatisfaction with the local public school system, particularly the failure to succeed with urban youth.
- Founders continue to be actively involved in the charter school as consensus builders and public relations advocates.
- Charter school founders most prize their students' academic success, positive attitudes toward learning, and the high level of parent involvement in the school.
- In roughly half of all schools, some or many of the founders became members of the school's board of trustees.
- Founders describe their relationships with the charter school director as good or excellent.

Trustees of Charter Schools
An attempt was made to interview a member of each school's board of trustees. Telephone interviews were conducted with trustees in eight of the 13 charter schools. The findings include the following:

- Charter school trustees take on the expected responsibilities of shaping policy, hiring the director, and providing financial oversight.
- During the initial year, trustees assumed many tasks usually performed by administrators, such as assisting with issues such as staffing, scheduling and public relations.
- Most boards meet once a month for two to three hours and hold board committee meetings at least once a month, but individual board members put in many additional hours fulfilling other board-related responsibilities.
- Most boards have had membership changes, which they attributed to inordinate time demands, or a desire to add parents.
- Most trustees say their boards have excellent relationships with the director.

ATTITUDES TOWARD CHARTER SCHOOLS: *External Constituents*
Outside of the charter school, an attempt was made to interview constituents in the district in which the charter school is housed, including: school superintendents, school board presidents, parent teacher organization presidents, and union leaders.

The 13 charter schools are located in nine districts. Two of the districts, Jersey City and Newark, are State Operated Districts, often referred to as "takeover districts" where the local board of education has been disbanded and the school superintendent has been appointed by the New Jersey State Department of Education. Two charter schools are regional schools that serve children from several districts.

School Superintendents in Local Education Districts
Officials in the local education districts were interviewed, including school superintendents in seven districts and associates responsible for charter schools in two districts. In regional charter schools, interviews were conducted in one of the affiliated districts. The findings include the following:

- All superintendents report that the presence of a charter school in their district has had little or no influence on curriculum, teaching or administrative practices in the district schools.
- The most significant influence of charter schools is the loss of funding for the district, sometimes resulting in personnel layoffs. In overcrowded districts, charter schools help to relieve overcrowding.
- Superintendents want charter schools to have public oversight and to be held accountable for results.
- Superintendents believe that the demand for charter schools is motivated by a desire for small schools with improved academic programs.
- Superintendents see the advantages of charter schools as freedom from bureaucracy and State regulations and the potential for providing competition.

School Board Presidents in the Local Education District

Attempts were made to interview presidents of the nine school boards of education in the districts in which the charter schools are located. In the two State takeover districts, elected boards were disbanded, and reconstituted by the State. Of the seven remaining school boards, telephone interviews were conducted with five school board presidents. The findings include the following:

- Board presidents observe that charter schools differ from schools in the district in terms of structure or curriculum, often providing a "narrower" focus and limited extracurricular activities.
- Board presidents say that the charter schools' main advantage is the ability to provide individual attention because of limited enrollment and narrow academic focus.
- Most board presidents claim charter schools have a negative effect on local districts by redirecting and draining finances.
- Most board presidents say there is no large-scale demand for charter schools nor are there enough children participating to constitute a real demand.

Union leaders in the Local Education District

Attempts were made to interview the nine union representatives for the districts in which the charter schools are located. Telephone surveys were completed with eight of the nine union representatives, including eight district union presidents and one vice president. The findings include the following:

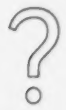
- Only one of the 13 charter schools is unionized and, except for the union representative who worked with this school, union representatives say they are not involved in or familiar with the schools.
- Union representatives believe there is a demand for charter schools because they offer something programmatically different such as small class size or the infusion of technology into the curriculum.
- Most union representatives say they are unaffected by charter schools at this time, but several feel the schools may provide incentives for change and competition.
- Freedom from bureaucratic rules and regulations and greater latitude in decision-making are described as advantages of charter schools.
- A major concern for union representatives is equity and access in student admission to charter schools.

Parent-Teacher Organization Presidents

Attempts were made to interview a president of a parent-teacher organization in one of the schools in the districts in which the charter schools are located. Telephone interviews were conducted with five out of a possible nine parent-teacher organization presidents of schools in the housing districts. The findings include the following:

- Parent-teacher organization presidents believe that parental choice is one advantage of charter schools.
- Parent-teacher organization presidents feel charter schools have created tension in the community.
- Several parent-teacher organization presidents feel that in addition to a loss of funding for the district, charter schools have been a burden on the administration.

Problems & Possibilities



WHAT ISSUES AND CONCERNS HAVE EMERGED DURING THE FIRST YEAR OF CHARTER SCHOOLS' OPERATION IN NEW JERSEY?

The research team tabulated interview responses to reveal issues of concern within constituent groups. These responses were then cross-tabulated across constituent groups to reveal central tendencies, and further supported by observation and/or demographic data. The issues and concerns that emerged have to do with funding, facilities, special education, growing pains, accountability, bureaucracy, and assessment.

Also included in this section is a discussion of the assumption that guided the New Jersey Charter School Program Act: the belief that charter schools can foster educational reform.

FUNDING

When cross-tabulating responses, funding emerged as the most immediate issue of concern across all constituent groups, and these concerns give rise to many of the other issues of concern discussed in this section. Several distinct themes emerged from the discussion of funding New Jersey charter schools:

Charter school constituents believe that charter schools are under-funded.

For the 1997-98 academic year, New Jersey charter schools report an average per-pupil cost of $6,925. While this money is designated for operating and instructional expenses, those involved in charter schools are quick to point out that they also have the added burden of facility capital costs, which place added strain on their budgets. A local district superintendent offered this summation: "Public money does not completely support them [charter schools] – running a school is costly, and these schools need to scramble for funding year by year."

When asked what the New Jersey State Legislature should know about charter schools, the overwhelming response from charter school directors was that charter schools are under-funded. One school director referred to the "triple whammy" of receiving no Abbot funds (state funds set aside for some poor urban school districts), no Title I funds (federal money set aside for schools serving low-income families), and only 90 percent of the local education districts' per-pupil expenditure. For 1997-98, this 90 percent allotment was based on a per-pupil expenditure dictated by the Thorough and Efficient Education Act, which is often much lower than the local districts actual program costs, further reducing charter schools' operating budget. While this issue has been addressed and amended in the most recent revision of the New Jersey Charter School Program Act, charter school constituents have felt its effects. One trustee explained:

> A number of the charter schools had the expectations that they would receive Title I and Abbot funds, and we have received neither. We have a lot of special needs students that need more financial resources. Our greatest challenge has been working with less money.

Teachers report that working with less money translates to a lack of support staff. Said one, "There is too much to do: grant writing, monitoring the breakfast and lunch programs, working on the newsletters; the secretary is the only administrative staff." While some of the funding discomforts of charter schools are due an underlying premise that they should be able to do more with less money through partnering with outside agencies, teachers report that their expanded workload is the most significant professional disadvantage of working at a charter school. "We have all the duties; playground, lunch, before school," offered one teacher. "If the toilet clogs during the day, we have to fix it."

Many charter school constituents are frustrated by State and federal regulations regarding grant money.

To be eligible for federal funding charter schools must be considered local educational districts, which means that charter schools have to file all the federal paperwork associated with these grants. Many charter school directors we spoke with signal frustration with this arrangement due to limited support staff and the complexity of applying for federal funding. Several founders raised the example of Title I aid, which is based on the previous year's enrollment. They pointed out that this arrangement means that a start-up school is ineligible for these moneys just at the time they need them most. A district superintendent echoed this point, and thought it odd that a charter school with one hundred students had to apply separately for Title I funds, Federal Technology funding, Early Childhood funding, and Perkins School to Work Funding instead of simply bundling the

school's enrollment numbers into the district application, the same way the district does for nonpublic schools. This sentiment is further reinforced by a founder who exclaimed: "I don't want to see another grant application!"

The current mechanism of charter school funding has created animosity between some of the local educational districts and the charter schools.
A director succinctly defined this funding mechanism as creating a "middle man" relationship between the charter school and the district. "As it stands," he said, "they're [the local district] nothing but a check-processing mill for us and that breeds resentment and antagonism. They feel as if the money is theirs for a short time, and then they give it away to us." Four of the nine district superintendents interviewed report that charter school funding has created an adversarial relationship between charter school and the local district. One superintendent wants the State legislature to know that "If you're going to deal with them, don't create the 'we versus them' mentality. When you say to a superintendent 'now take 4.5 million dollars off your budget,' how else can we react?" Another superintendent offers that the existence of a charter school in the district has had no effect on the district "other than the fact that we don't have that money to work with in a district that is already struggling for funds. It makes our job even tougher. It creates tensions and friction. My job is to lessen that tension and keep things moving in the right direction."

Funding-related resentment was also evident in some of the interview responses from school board presidents, union representatives and parent-teacher organization presidents. Said one PTO president: "They [charter schools] should look for more private funding. It's not fair that they drain our budget." While this suggestion runs counter to the intentions of the charter school movement, it does point to a general misconception that charter schools are not public schools. Five of the eight Union representatives interviewed responded that charter school funding had a negative impact on the district. One of these respondents pointed out that, "it appears that [when] a child goes to a charter school, if the child comes back [to the district school], the money doesn't follow [the child back to the district school]."

Outside constituents suggest that charter schools may attract new students to the local district who would not otherwise attend public school.
Some superintendents, PTO presidents, and union representatives suggest that charter schools place undue financial burden on the district by attracting students who have not been budgeted for – most notably children who would have attended parochial schools. Of the 51 parents interviewed for this study, 12 percent (six parents) responded that their children had attended parochial school last year and 1 percent report that their child attended private nonsectarian schools. This suggests that new students entered into the various local districts that would otherwise not have been in the public school population. While some may advocate this change from a public policy perspective, the monetary implications have been troubling for the local districts. One superintendent offered this analysis: "When kids come from outside the district [from parochial schools] this creates a funding dilemma." A union representative offered that "what's happening is that the kids going to these schools [charter schools] are not from our district. They're coming from parochial and private school." Whether students living in the district who attend private schools should be seen as not belonging to the district is debatable, but the accounting system of public schools – where funding is based on the previous year's enrollment – does place a burden on district budgets. Both the PTO and school board presidents who participated in this survey echoed similar concerns.

Reevaluating funding.
The majority of the respondents who expressed concerns or complaints about financial issues suggest that many of these problems can be cleared up by reevaluating the current funding mechanism. The most popular specific proposal given is that the State fund charter schools directly. Said one trustee: "The perception [that district money supports charter schools] is killing us. Any district that is sending students to charter schools, in their mind, they think it's their money. It's really the student's money."

Seven of the nine district superintendents were equally emphatic about reevaluating the way charter schools are funded, reporting that the current system has had a negative impact on district funding. One superintendent offers this solution: "there ought to be a separate piece of funding. I know they don't want to hear it, because it suggests more money, but something has to change." Another superintendent picks up this theme and extends it:

> "If the legislators are going to have charter schools (and it certainly looks like there will be charter schools), there ought to be a separate pot of money. Don't take the money off of struggling school districts. We are trying to deal with so many problems and so little money. We are dealing with infrastructure that is, for the most part, 75 or 80 years old. We need those resources here."

FACILITIES

Constituents inside charter schools report that facilities are one of the largest pieces of the administrative puzzle.
Five of the ten founders interviewed expressed a desire to obtain a new facility. Said one, "if dreams could come true, we would get a new building." Others referenced a lack of resources, such as a library, gymnasium and computer lab. "Our school is also too small physically," remarked one founder. "It just does not allow us to do everything we'd like to do." Another founder made a dire prediction: "With regard to long-term issues, facilities modification is a huge one. That is the biggest impediment to success – you're operating with handcuffs on – it will cause some schools to fail." Directors reinforce the notion that facility issues are a concern to New Jersey charter schools: ten of the thirteen directors interviewed responded that "space" was their most pressing need. "Nearly every problem we have," said one director, "can be traced to lack of space."

Several teachers also pointed to a lack of adequate instructional space as one of the things that they would like to change about their school, and a small cluster of student interviews reinforces this. Said one student: "We had no place for gym in winter." Parents echoed this concern, with the majority of parents who offered constructive criticism about their schools mentioning the facility as a priority. One parent offers this insight: "There is a fact that they [Charter Schools] lack a sense of permanency of location. I'm not sure how long they can exist if they are only able to be tenants. One thing charter schools are weak on is that they don't really have a place to call home."

This comment reflects the fact that all but three of the existing New Jersey charter schools either lease or share their facilities, and five schools consider their current sites to be temporary. Observations gathered during site visits suggest that while many of these schools are housed in adequate facilities, these buildings are often far from optimal. In one school, which leased space from the local elementary school, the director's office was located in a corridor until more space could be negotiated. In another school, researchers were hard pressed to find private areas in

which to conduct interviews. One founder was surprised by this revelation: "At the beginning of the school year we set [the director] up with a desk, a chair and some file cabinets. Not being an educator, I thought 'what more does he need'? Now I realize that a school's space is very important." It seems that while bricks and mortar alone do not define a school, they do play a large part in how a school delivers an education.

Four of the seven charter school trustees report that facility issues are a large part of their agenda. One of these wished "to be in one location. Whether we own or lease, we need to be in one place. That's one major thing we're working on now. A new building. That's been the one nightmare of the whole process." Trustees suggested that the root of the facility problem was inadequate funding. Said one:

> Funding is a problem, a big concern. I say this not because of the 90 percent allotment, but rather because of the case of facilities. In the districts, they have their schools, and they have their existing buildings. In the charter schools, the facilities come from your operating funds. You're getting 90 percent of district money, but in reality that's less when you take out facilities money. That's one thing that's overlooked.

Founders report that purchasing, constructing, or renovating a quality facility can run into the millions of dollars. Last year, New Jersey received $1,447,368 in charter school start-up funds from the federal government.[1] While this money can help move a school towards financing capital costs, it cannot fully fund these costs. A few New Jersey charter schools have met these costs by partnering with philanthropic foundations or outside agencies, and have created impressive permanent facilities. However, the majority of these schools are still addressing facility issues as one of their major concerns, which ultimately serves to divert time and energy away from their fundamental missions.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Special education presents a complex set of problems for charter schools.

Figure 5

Students with disabilities served by New Jersey charter schools: 4%
SOURCE: Self-reported data

Students with disabilities served by New Jersey district schools: 9.8%
SOURCE: New Jersey Department of Education

Students with disabilities served nationally by charter schools: 8.68%
SOURCE: US Department of Education

Students with disabilities served nationally by public schools: 9.77%
SOURCE: US Department of Education

1 New Jersey Department of Education

Self-reported data suggests that charter schools may not be serving a proportional number of special-needs students in comparison to the State and national data available for other public schools (see figure 5). When speaking about under-funding, many directors spoke specifically about special education, and the demands placed upon them to fund child study teams and deliver a continuum of special services. One director offers an anecdote about an accessible bathroom that was stipulated in a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP). He reports that the charter school spent $2,000 to renovate an existing bathroom, but was only reimbursed $280 by the State.

This example is suggestive of the way that special education, which is an expensive and highly prescriptive affair, does not fit well into the deregulated school model of the charter school. This is exacerbated by the fact that more than half of the teachers working in New Jersey charter schools have less than three years' experience as classroom teachers, and often have limited formal training or experience with special education. When asked about professional disadvantages of working at a charter school, the most frequent teacher response was the amount of responsibility that teachers were expected to shoulder, and the lack of support staff – including special education teachers.

This said, it is important to note that some charter schools have good special education plans in place, and their small size, academic intimacy and inclusive philosophy may reduce unnecessary special education referrals. One director speaks of the progress that the school has made with special needs students:

> The records we received from the district were staggered in their delivery, so we discovered "reality" about a child later. One kid identified by us as needing special education was not nearly the extreme case he was presented as being by the district. This environment has benefited this child, the same with those who were candidates for being "left back."

Other interviews with charter school directors suggest problems in securing special education assessments because several districts were unwilling or unable to extend child-study team services to the charter schools. While private and parochial schools may contract to outside agencies for this service, federal law requires that an Individual Education Plan (IEP) can only be written by a member of the local education district.[2] This IEP is required before students can be classified as learning disabled and the school can receive federal and state assistance in offering special services. Until this occurs, the charter school incurs all the costs associated with both the child-study team and the special needs student. One charter school director described this arrangement as a "poison pill" which can be used by the local district to hurt charter schools financially, and referenced a parent of an unclassified special needs child who claimed she was encouraged to apply to the charter school by district administrators.

Researchers also noticed the effect of this arrangement during site-observations. In one school a child who was unable to function in the classroom was removed and placed under the constant supervision of an educational aid or the director. Another school reported that a behaviorally disruptive child was removed from the school and given a home-study program until an appropriate special education plan could be developed.

2 Individuals with Educational Disabilities Act of 1997 Public Law 105-17

Charter schools' difficulty with special education is also referenced by some of the district superintendents, albeit from a different perspective. One noted that "I don't believe that charter schools can effectively serve special needs students in the least restrictive environment – they can't afford it." Another suggested that the charter school in his district filtered special needs students from its population:

> Initially there seemed to be a reflection of the [community] population in terms of kids on free and reduced lunches and racial composition. But some of this has shaken out now and the composition of the students has changed so that there are no kids with special education needs since they moved or were outplaced.

GROWING PAINS

Many of the problems that arose this year are a result of doing everything for the first time. Creating autonomous public schools, providing oversight for accountability, and locating charter schools as independent public schools within districts are all new practices that have to be learned and honed through experience.

The much sought-after freedom to create an autonomous public school came as a shock to some people. From the lack of equipment to the absence of support personnel, charter school pioneers were often unprepared to start everything from scratch. As one director said, "Most administrative courses are about what to do as an administrator in an already established school, not about how to establish one." Another director described that when she arrived in the office she found absolutely no equipment, just a folding chair and a folding table:

> That's it! I remember thinking to myself, 'How can you ask me to lead a school and you don't even give me a desk?' There was no one to call. And it was then that I realized that if this was going to happen I had to rely on myself to get things done. It was then that I really understood the whole charter thing. Many people go through the planning stages thinking there really is a supervisor out there ready to help, or a superintendent somewhere ready to answer questions. But in the end, it's just you.

Another director said, "Things you take for granted are not there. I go reach for the policy book or the curriculum guidelines and they are not there. We have to create these things." However, it is the very act of creation that appears to motivate those associated with charter schools to volunteer endless hours of their time and to glean ownership and satisfaction from the results. One teacher said with pride, "The faculty has done it all, I never realized how much the district's curriculum is a crutch. It was scary at first, but it's good to see it grow." Teachers were most unhappy in schools where they were given a pre-set curriculum. "We're not treated like professionals," complained a teacher in a school where teachers were handed a ready-made curriculum.

Faculty and administration realize that their school is still a work in progress. Directors of several schools acknowledged that while they were making progress in achieving their goals, a great deal remained to be accomplished. Issues of curriculum and discipline were concerns for many of the charter schools and some are still working hard at community building, public relations and learning to deal with the media.

Administration and boards have had to learn administrative codes and regulations. Several schools have had to adjust their mission to the realities of their student body. A founder of one charter school said that the academic component has been challenged by the reality that students have a

lower academic performance than anticipated. Another founder said, "The whole process takes time. We're growing into it. We say we're a math, science, and technology school, yet we didn't get computers until last week [March]."

But charter school personnel appear to be inspired by how far they have come. One director seemed to reflect the general sentiment: "Yes, there are plenty of things we need to improve, but seeing what we have done already convinces me that we must go on." Several directors indicated that even with advanced planning time directors should expect organization and planning to be continuous: "Realize that planning is not just an initial stage, but ongoing. What works on paper in the charter may not work in reality."

Continuous planning and the opportunity to shape what happens at the school site may be the crux of what engages founders, trustees, teachers, administrators, and parents, and ultimately may serve to strengthen the school community. The results of the initial year may be instructive in demonstrating that teachers and administrators are willing to work hard when they are given an opportunity to exercise their professional expertise.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Built into the charter concept is the tradeoff of autonomy for accountability, giving schools autonomy to shape their own programs and practices with minimal government intervention, but holding them accountable for student achievement results.
The New Jersey Charter School Program Act states that "the commissioner shall assess whether each charter is meeting the goals of its charter," and gives responsibility to the county superintendent in which the charter school is located for "on-going access to records and facilities of the charter school to ensure that the charter school is in compliance with its charter and that State regulations regarding assessment, testing, civil rights, and student health and safety are being met." However, the specific mechanisms for charter school oversight are unclear, at least in the eyes of charter school directors and school superintendents of local education districts. Charter school directors say they are not certain who is assessing their schools and precisely how they are going to be assessed.

Outside constituents are concerned about a lack of public accountability for charter schools.
Those on the outside – union representatives and district superintendents, for example – appear to have similar questions, but their concerns center around a lack of public accountability and oversight. As one district superintendent noted, "In theory it's an excellent idea. There's nobody there to monitor them, however." District union representatives expressed concerns that focused on issues of equity and access, specifically how students are recruited through the lottery system and whether advertising about the charter school was "selective." One union representative felt that if the charter school only advertises to a certain segment of the population it is "de facto discriminating against others." These are important issues, with legal implications, that relate to core democratic values of public education. Whether the concerns raised are perception or reality, certainly the State, school districts and charter schools need to clarify charter school oversight.

Charter school constituents are concerned with unanticipated demands from the state and the district.
On the other hand, other indications suggest that the state is monitoring the schools, perhaps more than the charter schools would like. Charter school directors and trustees complain that their autonomy is being threatened by the state's increasing rules and regulations and the requirements to fill out "all sorts of forms," which they refer to pejoratively as "paperwork." One director said he could

not distinguish the demands the state places on charter schools from those placed on the standard public schools. "I'm curious as to what those differences are because the amount of paperwork seems to be the same," he noted. "They say you won't have to do it [paperwork] and then you do have to do it." Several charter schools point to the frustration and bureaucratic entanglement they experienced with the local education district and the State when trying to arrange for a child-study team assessment (as discussed earlier under special education). Beyond the State, schools that applied for federal school aid object similarly to bureaucratic encumbrances.

BUREAUCRACY

Although charter schools struggle with more federal, state, and district management than initially expected, they enjoy autonomy in managing their internal affairs.
The state may be guilty of encroaching bureaucratic restraints, but the response of charter schools needs to be considered in the context of their situation. As independent public schools, charter schools are the sole agency to supply information. There is no district office, for example, to provide a buffer or to respond to requests on behalf of the school. In addition, lean staffing, a result of both financial exigencies, and a philosophical disposition toward staffing classrooms rather than offices, make any outside request seem burdensome.

Most public school principals can spread paperwork among middle managers and assistant principals, for example. Secretaries are also available to perform clerical tasks. For charter schools, where the director is often the only administrator, external demands of any kind from the state, district or federal government may seem onerous. One trustee who complained of too many regulations expressed the general sentiment: "I'd like us not to be treated as if we were a one-school district. We're a bare bones operation, so we don't have the kind of administration to do all the paperwork of a large district."

While charter schools are subjected to more micromanagement than they like, they appear to enjoy a comparatively large degree of autonomy in directing their internal affairs. "If we think of a good idea for the school, we bring it to the board and we can make it happen within the week," exclaimed one of the directors. Another charter school director noted, "Usually, school boards are most invested in tax dollars and conserving funding. Here, the board is invested in the educational process and on board with the [school's] vision."

Members of the boards of trustees and charter school administrators indicate that they share a strong and supportive relationship.
The results of the interviews indicate that school site governing bodies appear to enjoy positive relations with directors – and that the feeling is mutual on the part of the directors. Most of the fledgling charter school directors regard their boards as a resource. If anything, directors want boards that haven't been particularly active to get even more involved. "I'm actively working with them," said one director, "so they know how to do more." If charter schools in New Jersey are typical of other non-profit organizations with boards, eventually directors will want the involvement of the board to be curtailed, particularly in administrative matters. Currently, however, charter school directors appear to welcome all the help they can get. No one we interviewed complained of unwanted interference. One director seemed to express the general disposition toward the boards: "We don't see them as a threat, but as a fully supportive group." At least for the time being, perceptions of bureaucratic entanglements from the outside contrast with views of largely unfettered working relationship within charter schools.

ASSESSMENT

Charter schools would prefer comprehensive assessment methods in addition to standardized testing.

For their part, charter schools fully expect to be assessed. The application for a charter requires specification of the educational goals of the school, the curriculum to be offered, and the methods of assessing whether students are meeting educational goals. Most agree that testing is the most objective approach for the State, and district superintendents and union representatives want charter schools to be assessed exactly the way district schools are assessed – through test scores, drop-out rates and other statistical measures.

Charter school directors, teachers, founders, and trustees had much to say about how the tests should be conducted and about other assessment approaches that they would welcome. Many teachers, directors, and trustees emphasized that testing statistics should be predicated on baseline data, not just average school scores. Beyond standardized testing, and other expected assessments, such as statistics on attendance, transfers, and faculty turnover, charter school personnel want a comprehensive evaluation that acknowledges the unique features of the schools.

As one director who hoped for a multiple assessment approach noted, "Charter schools are both in and out of the box." The assessments suggested by teachers and administrators include a wide range of quantitative and qualitative approaches including:

- Standardized tests
- Attitudinal surveys of students, parents, teachers and community members
- The number of parent volunteer hours
- Narrative reports on children
- Assigned grades
- Student portfolios
- Evaluation of the school program in the context of the mission
- Teacher evaluations
- Financial reviews
- Classroom observations

Perhaps the best test of charter school success will be parents who "vote with their feet." One founder summed up a shared perspective: "If the school is not good, the parents will flee. That's the best test of all."

Directors and teachers suggest school and classroom observations as part of the charter schools' evaluation.

It is worth noting that fully half of the teachers and most of the directors suggested that evaluators come to observe the school in action, to capture the ethos of the school. This is in contrast to the majority of schools, where teachers are generally uncomfortable with "observations," which are usually conducted once or twice a year by supervisors for evaluation purposes. The classroom is regarded as an "inner sanctum" for teachers, and except for planned occasions, neither colleagues in the same school nor parents are likely to visit during class time.

By design or necessity, the initial months of charter school operation resulted in an increase in classroom interaction with colleagues, parents, directors, and board members, and served to acclimate teachers to having visitors in their classrooms. In our site visits, for example, the research team noted the presence of other adults in classrooms including parents (visiting or volunteering), community volunteers, and teachers and directors moving comfortably in and out of classrooms. The research team, all teachers themselves, was surprised by how comfortable teachers were in their presence.

Teachers in most schools in the nation enjoy the congeniality of the school community, but schools often fail to be collegial in the professional sense that works for school improvement. If charter schools succeed in breaking down barriers to adult interaction in classrooms, they may also serve to encourage collegiality and abate the sense of isolation that many public school teachers experience.

Evaluation methods should be guided by the intent of the New Jersey Charter School Program Act.
As the state, the district, the charter schools, and the citizens of New Jersey proceed to evaluate charter schools they need to be guided by the intent of the Act, which includes increasing choices for students and parents, encouraging innovative learning methods, establishing new forms of accountability, requiring the measurement of learning outcomes and establishing new opportunities for teachers. Such a broad and hopeful mandate will require what charter school constituents hope for, multiple approaches and attention to both intended and unintended consequences. Government agencies will also need to assess the degree to which they respect charter schools' autonomy without micromanaging, while ensuring that these schools are held fully accountable for results.

POSSIBILITIES - CHARTER SCHOOLS AS A REFORM EFFORT

From their inception in Minnesota in 1991, the intent of charter schools was not just to create a few schools to better serve a relatively small number of students; it was intended to influence the larger system.[3] Freed from the bureaucratic restraints that can stifle good ideas, many charter schools throughout the country have become centers of innovation. A recent national study of charter schools in 13 states heralds charter schools as "a giant step toward the reinvention of public education in America. Charter schools are creating a new kind of American public school," claim the authors, "and much can be learned from them."[4]

Whether through competition or by example, charter schools may encourage the system to change.
In New Jersey, a number of signs indicate that this is beginning to happen. Though some districts may view charter schools as a threat – as does one superintendent, who claimed that the State has created "a natural enemy situation because enrollment is dropping 125 to 150 kids a year," – others find that the competition offers a healthy impetus for needed change. A union representative in one district observed that the charter school's opening encouraged the union to push for parent involvement. "From the association's [union] point of view," he noted, "we have become more community oriented. We have established better programs to help parents do better with their kids." Another union representative commented that, "Most charter schools don't have heavy administration, so it might open up the concept that if you reduce administrative staff and invest money in smaller class size, it might be better spent."

3. Ted Kolderie, *The States Will Have to Withdraw the Exclusive* (St. Paul Institute for Policy Studies, 1990)

4. Bruno V. Manno, Chester E. Finn, Jr. Louann A. Bierlein, and Greg Vanourek, "How Charter Schools Are Different: Lessons and Implications From a National Study," (*Phi Delta Kappan*, March 1998, p. 490)

Responding to a question on the influence of charter schools with regard to teaching, a school superintendent observed, "They make us realize that we have to become more competitive and do a better job in school and in public relations." The president of a parent-teacher organization in a district school said that they added a technology coordinator in response to competition from a technically oriented charter school.

Perhaps the most significant innovation charter schools may foster is the freedom to implement practices that many school districts throughout the country already recognize as effective – practices that bureaucratic restraints may have prevented from working their way into the school system.
Perhaps the most significant innovation charter schools may foster is the freedom to implement practices that many schools throughout the country already recognize as effective – practices that have not worked themselves into the system because of a lack of autonomy.

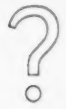
If nothing else, charter schools may prompt district schools to demand some of the same liberties that charter schools enjoy. As one union representative explained, "To make it fair, they [the state] should allow the [district] public schools to have the same freedom the charter schools have." Though charter schools in New Jersey appear to be constrained by the same state bureaucratic demands imposed on the district, they have the advantages of self-governance by an independent board of trustees and can make budgetary decisions at the school level. They are also free from collective bargaining units when negotiating labor decisions.

Researchers who have conducted national studies of charter schools suggest that charter schools can serve as research and development (R & D) centers for trying out new ideas (Manno, 490). School superintendents may eventually look to charter schools as models. One district superintendent said, "If they [charter schools] are successful, they might provide some educational models which we can use in the neighborhood schools. It is interesting to meet the people attempting to start these school," she noted. "They think differently and come up with some interesting ideas." The director of a charter school said he hoped the schools would serve a larger purpose. "A small mission-driven school," he noted, "may be a model for the whole system." A charter school founder said, "I like to think of the charter schools as R & D [Research and Development] – every good business budgets for R & D, and I believe that charter school can be 'the Saturn Division of GM.'"

For charter schools to serve an R & D function they need to fulfill their promise as public schools accessible to all children. All parents in the district need to be informed of the charter school option and the process of selection. Charter schools need to dispel the belief that they are "private schools with public funds," as one union president described them. And charter schools have to welcome colleagues, teachers and administrators from the district. One union president said, "only the people who have children there can visit." Whether perception or reality, charter schools need to make a concerted effort to open their doors to the professional community if they are to serve a larger purpose.

Two charter school directors recommended involving the local district in the planning process whenever possible "You have to say to the district, 'We're here in part as an experiment for you. What would you like us to try?' You'll have a lot of doors slammed in your face," said the director, "but you have to actively cultivate those relationships and work at them over time."

Early Lessons



WHAT LESSONS HAVE CHARTER SCHOOL CONSTITUENTS LEARNED THAT WOULD BE HELPFUL FOR OTHERS FOUNDING CHARTER SCHOOLS?

One of the purposes of this study is to gather and publish the early lessons that charter school directors, founders, trustees, and teachers have learned during their first year of operation in New Jersey. To accomplish this we asked each of these constituents to draw on their experiences and offer critical pieces of advice to the next group of charter recipients who will open their doors in 1998-99. For some questions, the survey protocol asked questions about three distinct phases of founding a charter school: the application phase, which we defined as the time prior to charter acceptance; the start-up phase, which we defined as the time between acceptance and the first day of school; and the operation phase, which we defined as the time after opening day.

The following section is a compilation of these responses. While central tendencies are noted, singular responses are also included to provide a full account of these early lessons.

EARLY LESSONS LEARNED BY: *Charter School Teachers*

When asked to reflect upon their first year experience, charter school teachers offered the following advice:

Understand job demands

The majority of teachers emphasized the time commitment that charter schools demand and the importance of knowing the school's charter proposal and mission. As the schools are intimate in nature, teachers also advised meeting colleagues, parents, and trustees, and understanding the student population being served.

Be flexible

Teachers described all manners of situations that required them to be flexible, from scheduling to attending mandatory community events. They also suggested that openness to innovation and comfort with ambiguity are necessary character traits among charter school faculty.

EARLY LESSONS LEARNED BY: *Charter School Directors*

When asked to reflect upon their first year experience as charter school administrators, directors offered the following advice:

Expect long hours

"There is a ton of work and a tremendous amount of time involved." One director estimated that she spends 80 to 90 hours per week at her school; she suggests that those choosing to run charter schools should "expect to put your life into it."

Set limits

A director who felt the onset of burnout shared this: "We were spending our entire life here in the fall, and in March we decided to force ourselves to leave the building at 5:30 p.m. everyday. It's really helped keep us sane."

Provide staff development

Several charter schools provide training prior to the opening of school as well as ongoing staff development. They report that the ability to think strategically is much easier when time is set aside to do so.

Budget your time

Several directors recommended organizing, planning, and building lots of lead time into a strategic plan. The majority of directors cautioned that the various aspects of directing a charter school invariably take longer than expected, and that those aspects involving funding – facility, renovation, construction, staffing, supplies – were almost always more expensive than originally estimated.

Plan and revise

One director cautioned, "Realize that planning is not just an initial stage, but ongoing. What works on paper in the charter may not work in reality." Another recommended "being as much a risk taker as a mistake maker. When you make a mistake, refocus, get it together and move on."

Build relationships
Directors report that they are suddenly "public figures." As such, every relationship and contact that is made becomes important. Perhaps the most important of these is the relationship with the local education district. One director explains: "You have to actively cultivate those relationships and work at them over time."

EARLY LESSONS LEARNED BY: *Charter School Founders and Trustees*
When asked to reflect upon their experiences, founders and trustees offered the following advice:

Teamwork is essential
There is simply too much work to be done – one person can never complete it.

Develop thick skin
Regarding an appearance before a regional school board, one founder offered: "Unless you're used to it, you'll be shocked, especially if you're not prepared for personal attacks from the board."

Too much to do, too little time
"Those considering a charter should assume that they will be approved," was the advice from one founder; he explained that the time between charter acceptance and operation is actually much shorter than it first seems. Another founder warned: "Deal with building [concerns] months ahead of time. It will take three months longer than you think."

Hire the right director as soon as possible
Several founders advise that the director should be involved from the beginning of the application phase. One trustee suggested "selecting someone that you feel can lead that mission and culture [of the charter school]." "High energy" was also given as a prerequisite. One trustee offered this summation: "Above all, it has to be a person who is a self starter – you have to have a take charge person – that personality is the soul of the school."

Listen to parents
Founders and trustees note that parents represent a vital constituency. Said one founder: "You have to listen to parents. With their input, we made numerous changes during the first semester." Another founder cautioned that, "One very angry parent can undo a lot of positive work."

Expect a steep learning curve
Trustees and founders alike were amazed at the number of details involved in starting a school. One wished that "we could have been more prepared. I felt like we were always playing catch-up." Another noted that, "Most schools have those support structures already in place, but in charter schools you have to set standards. You have to invent procedures."

Cultivate a relationship with the local district
Several founders and trustees stressed the importance developing a cooperative relationship with the local district office. Some founders spent quite a bit of time discussing their school plans with the local superintendents before they drafted their charter. Said one, "I think that the meeting [with district personnel] and the relationship were critical to [our] success.

Recruit a working board
Trustees need members who will work hard. "If you're willing to do the work that needs to be done," said one trustee, "then we're excited to have you."

Have professional expertise
When asked about sources of professional expertise, the following list was generated:

- Find a grant writer
- Hire a CPA or business consultant immediately to help with the budget, lottery, and accounting
- Retain legal counsel
- Explore options for different service providers
- Use an educational expert for staff and curriculum development

WHEN ASKED TO GIVE ADVICE ABOUT THE SCHOOL'S APPLICATION PHASE, THOSE DIRECTORS WHO WERE INVOLVED WITH THE SCHOOL'S APPLICATION PHASE OFFERED THIS ADVICE:

- Set realistic deadlines with plenty of built-in time
- Expect delays, especially when gathering information from varied sources
- Staffing takes much longer than originally anticipated

WHEN ASKED TO GIVE ADVICE ABOUT THE SCHOOL'S START-UP PHASE, THE DIRECTORS' ADVICE FELL INTO THREE BASIC CATEGORIES: STAFFING, PARENT INVOLVEMENT, AND ADMINISTRATION.

Staffing

- Hire teachers as soon as possible
- Involve parents in the hiring process
- Seek experienced teachers
- Look for risk takers
- Thoroughly explain the time commitment involved
- Make sure that teachers' philosophy of education is in agreement with the school's philosophy and mission
- Find teachers who are committed to teaching the student population being served – if the school is going to teach urban children, then the teachers should love working with urban children
- Be thorough, teachers are the heart and soul of the school

Parental Involvement

- Invite parents and students to the school to establish a sense of ownership
- Clearly define the parents' role in the school
- Communicate openly with parents
- Make good use of parent volunteers

Administration

- Develop written policies and procedures
- Communicate frequently and openly with those with whom you share facility space
- Begin ordering supplies immediately
- Be knowledgeable about the culture of children you are serving

Demographics

A demographic survey was mailed to each school that mirrored questions from the New Jersey Schools Report Card, the primary means of assessment for New Jersey Public Schools. This survey sought quantifiable data pertaining to students, faculty, and funding.

A copy of the demographic survey is included in the appendix.

Table 1: Student Demographic Information

Academic Year 1997 – 1998

	Elysian Charter School	Galloway Kindergarten Charter School	Gateway Charter School	Jersey City Community Charter School	Leap Academy Charter School	The Learning Community Charter School	North Star Academy Charter School	Princeton Charter School	Robert Treat Academy Charter School	Samuel D. Proctor Academy Charter School	Soaring Heights Charter School	Sussex County Charter School for Technology	Trenton Community Charter School
Students Currently Enrolled	74	187	24	61	324	98	72	71	100	48	85	50	150
Students Who Have Left School	2	19	6	7	DNR	5	0	4	1	12	7	8	3
Funding Per Pupil	$6,300	DNR	$7,500	DNR	$7,000	$7,300	$7,478	$6,600	$7,615	$7,100	$5,856	$7,000	$7,000
Students Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch	30	31	24	61	DNR	41	64	7	66	32	69	3	92
Students with Individualized Education Plan (IEP)	0	2	2	DNR	23	3	1	2	0	4	7	6	6
Current Student to Teacher Ratio	11:1	17:1	12:1	9:1	20:1	13:1	9:1	14:1	8:1	8:1	15:1	13:1	15:1
Percentage of Students Withdrawn	*3%*	*10%*	*25%*	*12%*	*>10%*	*5%*	*0%*	*6%*	*1%*	*25%*	*8%*	*16%*	*2%*
Percentage of Students Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch	*41%*	*17%*	*100%*	*100%*	*DNR*	*42%*	*89%*	*10%*	*66%*	*67%*	*81%*	*6%*	*61%*
Percentage of Students with Individualized Education Plan (IEP)	*0%*	*1%*	*1%*	*DNR*	*7%*	*3%*	*1%*	*3%*	*0%*	*8%*	*8%*	*12%*	*4%*
Students in Lottery	76	N/A	46	DNR	500	150	222	156	147	86	200	107	225

DNR = School Did Not Report Data N/A = Not Applicable

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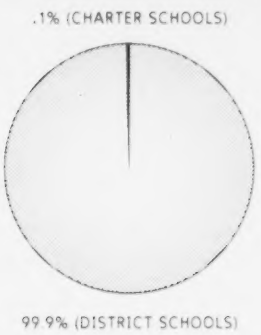
Figure 3: Student Demographic Information

Academic Year 1997 – 1998

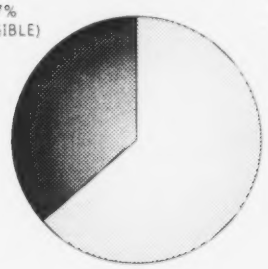


NEW JERSEY PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS ENROLLED IN CHARTER SCHOOLS ..... [.1%]

TOTAL STUDENTS ENROLLED IN CHARTER SCHOOLS: 1,344

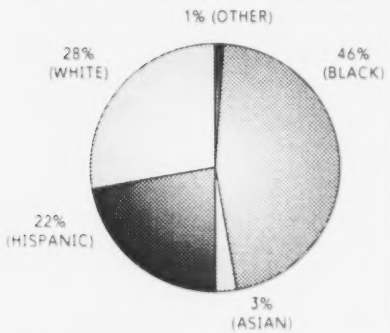
TOTAL STUDENTS ENROLLED IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS: 1,241,081

Source: New Jersey Department of Education



NEW JERSEY CHARTER SCHOOL STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE/REDUCED LUNCH 57%

THE FEDERAL FREE/REDUCED LUNCH PROGRAM PROVIDES FREE OR LOW COST LUNCHES TO STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME FAMILIES



STUDENT PROFILE: ETHNICITY

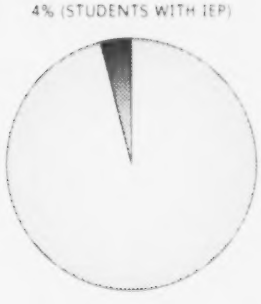
ASIAN: 3%

BLACK 46%

HISPANIC 22%

WHITE 28%

OTHER 1%



NEW JERSEY CHARTER SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLANS (IEP) 4%

AN IEP LEGALLY CLASSIFIES STUDENTS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION FUNDING

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Table 2: Faculty Demographic Information

Academic Year 1997 – 1998

	Elysian Charter School	Galloway Kindergarten Charter School	Gateway Charter School	Jersey City Community Charter School	Leap Academy Charter School	The Learning Community Charter School	North Star Academy Charter School	Princeton Charter School	Robert Treat Academy Charter School	Samuel D. Proctor Academy Charter School	Soaring Heights Charter School	Sussex County Charter School for Technology	Trenton Community Charter School
Faculty	6	11	6	7	19	7	8	5	13	6	8	4	11
Faculty with Less than Three Years Professional Experience	3	4	2	5	13	5	3	2	6	6	6	1	7
Faculty with More than Three Years Professional Experience	3	7	4	2	6	2	5	3	7	0	3	3	4
Faculty Pursuing Alternate Route Certification	1	1	1	4	4	2	2	0	2	5	2	1	2
Faculty with Bachelors Degree	1	8	5	6	14	2	3	1	11	4	6	2	7
Faculty with Masters Degree	5	3	1	1	5	5	5	4	1	2	2	2	4
Faculty with Degree Other than Education	2	3	3	2	5	0	7	1	0	0	3	1	2
Average Faculty Salary	$34,000	$26,700	$27,000	DNR	$36,000	$29,000	$37,500	$31,000	$28,200	$34,000	$39,000	$30,000	$34,000
Percentage of Faculty with Less than 3 Years Professional Experience	*43%*	*36%*	*33%*	*71%*	*68%*	*69%*	*37.5%*	*40%*	*46%*	*100%*	*75%*	*25%*	*54%*
Percentage of Faculty with More than 3 Years Professional Experience	*43%*	*64%*	*67%*	*29%*	*32%*	*27%*	*62.5%*	*60%*	*54%*	*0%*	*38%*	*75%*	*46%*
Percentage of Faculty Pursuing Alternate Route Certification	*14%*	*9%*	*17%*	*57%*	*21%*	*27%*	*25%*	*0%*	*15%*	*83%*	*25%*	*25%*	*18%*
Percentage of Faculty with Bachelors Degree	*14%*	*73%*	*83%*	*86%*	*74%*	*29%*	*29%*	*20%*	*85%*	*67%*	*75%*	*50%*	*64%*
Percentage of Faculty with Bachelors and Masters Degree	*86%*	*27%*	*17%*	*14%*	*26%*	*71%*	*71%*	*80%*	*15%*	*33%*	*25%*	*50%*	*36%*
Percentage of Faculty with Degree Other than Education	*33%*	*27%*	*50%*	*29%*	*26%*	*0%*	*89%*	*20%*	*0%*	*0%*	*38%*	*25%*	*18%*

DNR = School Did Not Report Data N/A = Not Applicable

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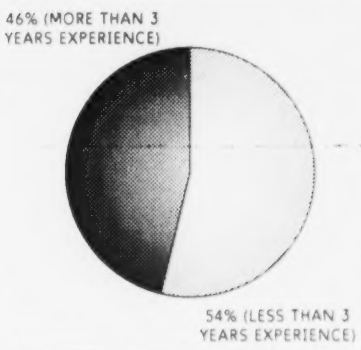
School Profiles

The following section presents profiles of each school. This includes self-reported data from the profiled schools, the mission statement, and a brief description of both the facility and the educational program.

Figure 4: Faculty Demographic Information

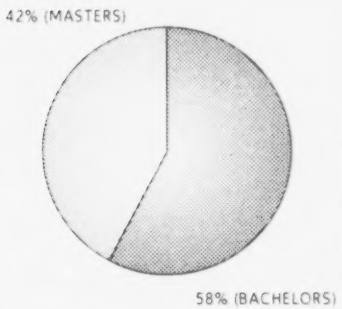
Academic Year 1997 – 1998



FACULTY PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE* (IN YEARS)

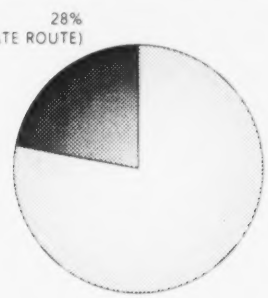
MORE THAN 3 YEARS EXPERIENCE	46%
LESS THAN 3 YEARS EXPERIENCE	54%

*Experience is defined as classroom teaching.



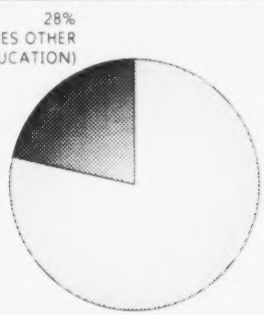
FACULTY EDUCATION

MASTERS DEGREE	42%
BACHELORS DEGREE	58%



FACULTY PURSUING ALTERNATE ROUTE CERTIFICATION 28%

ALTERNATE ROUTE CERTIFICATION IS AN ON-THE-JOB LICENSURE PROGRAM FOR QUALIFIED LIBERAL ARTS GRADUATES WHO HAVE NOT COMPLETED PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION DEGREES IN A TRADITIONAL TEACHER-TRAINING PROGRAM.



FACULTY WITH DEGREES OTHER THAN EDUCATION 28%

Recommendations & Implications for Further Research

New Jersey Charter Schools: The First Year tells the charter schools' story during their first year of operation. Specifically, we address:

- Distinctive features of the 13 charter schools
- Attitudes and experiences of those involved, both directly and indirectly
- Problems that need to be addressed
- Early lessons

Our hope is that the results of the study will inform the decisions of policy makers and government officials as they strive to improve the quality of education for all children in New Jersey. We also hope that the study will be useful to families considering charter schools, for district personnel who interact with charter schools, and for those currently working in charter schools or planning to open charter schools.

Future studies need to build on this initial inquiry by following-up on the problems identified in this report – including financing, facilities, and special education, and issues of accountability, bureaucracy, and assessment. These studies should also assess the degree to which the schools are fulfilling the intent of the New Jersey Charter School Program Act regarding:

- Improving student learning
- Increasing educational choices
- Encouraging different and innovative learning methods
- Establishing a new form of accountability for schools
- Measuring learning outcomes
- Making the school the unit for educational improvement
- Providing new professional opportunities for teachers

Future studies should seek comprehensive measures of results, both quantitative and qualitative, which become appropriate after a longer period of operation. Assessments should also consider the degree to which individual schools are achieving their stated mission and goals. For comparative purposes, the state may want to commission a study of students attending charter schools and those attending district schools who applied to charter schools but were not selected in the lottery.

In authorizing future studies, the demands of the research model on the schools themselves needs to be balanced with respect for the frenetic pace of school life and the availability of personnel at the school to respond to requests. Although every charter school eventually participated in the study, taking the time to supply even basic demographic information was a burden for several charter schools.

Finally, the results of charter school assessments need to be considered as a whole. The movement should not be celebrated with one or two schools that stand out as shining stars, nor should it be damned by one or two abysmal disappointments. Beyond the constituents of the school, success or failure needs to be partly measured by the impact of charter schools on the wider educational system. Charter schools touch the core of our nation's most pressing educational problems of equity and excellence – issues that warrant our most thoughtful consideration.

The Elysian Charter School of Hoboken

Sponsoring District: Hoboken School District

LOCATION	HOBOKEN, HUDSON COUNTY (URBAN)
ENROLLMENT	74
FACULTY	5
GRADE LEVELS	KINDERGARTEN THROUGH 2ND

STUDENT PROFILE

Asian: 19% Black: 8% Hispanic: 28% White: 45%
Free lunch eligibility: 41% (30 students)

MISSION

Elysian Charter School provides its students with a thorough understanding of and appreciation for the world's human and natural environments through a unique and continuous in-depth study of their most immediate environment – the people, resources, and history of Hoboken, New Jersey.

FACILITY

The school leases five classroom and one administrative office on the top floor of the Wallace elementary school, a local district public school.

EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Elysian school is a parent-teacher-community collaboration with an emphasis on high expectations and student achievement. The curriculum is guided by the New Jersey Core Curriculum Standards and is child-centered and thematic in nature. The school is creating assessment standards based on a developmental checklist.

GOVERNANCE

At the school level, the school is led by a director/ lead teacher and the teachers. At the strategic level, the school is led by an eight-member board of trustees, which includes many of the original founders.

Galloway Kindergarten Charter School

Sponsoring District: Galloway School District

LOCATION	GALLOWAY, ATLANTIC COUNTY (SUBURBAN)
ENROLLMENT	187
FACULTY	11
GRADE LEVEL	KINDERGARTEN

STUDENT PROFILE

Asian: 4% Black: 11% Hispanic: 6% White: 80%
Free lunch eligibility: 17% (31 students)

MISSION

The Galloway Kindergarten Charter School (GKCS) delivers a full-day developmental and academic Kindergarten to all children regardless of race, creed, national origin, or economic status. Furthermore, the school provides the building blocks needed for not just twelve or sixteen years of a typical academic career, but lifelong learning.

FACILITY

GKCS has 11 classrooms located at two sites. The administrative office and seven small classrooms are located in a cluster of colonial buildings, which were once a retail site, in Galloway, New Jersey. Four other classrooms are located in a church in Absecon, New Jersey.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

GKCS offers a full-day kindergarten program with an integrated, experiential, and thematic curricula. The school offers before and after-school programs for a fee. Teachers have considerable autonomy for instructional methods, meeting weekly to assess, revise, and plan curriculum. Teachers have responsibility for assessment through monthly developmental skills' checklists, while the master teacher is responsible for assessments of each child according to an individually prescribed educational plan. Teacher salary increases depend on an 85 percent minimum mastery level per class. Parents volunteer often in classrooms, as well as with field trips, special events, and fundraising. During the spring of 1998, GKCS began offering Suzuki violin lessons as a free after-school activity.

GOVERNANCE

GKCS's Board of Trustees consists of seven members: one teacher, three community members, and three current GKCS parents. The board works primarily on facility and funding issues, delegating educational program issues to the master teacher.

Gateway Charter School

Sponsoring District: Jersey City School District

LOCATION	JERSEY CITY, HUDSON COUNTY (URBAN)
ENROLLMENT	24
FACULTY	6
GRADE LEVEL	6TH

STUDENT PROFILE

Black: 60% Hispanic: 30% White: 10%
Free lunch eligibility: 100% (24 students)

MISSION

Gateway Charter School offers a program of study designed to enhance occupational preparation. The targeted student population is sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade students who, because of a range of family and community barriers, are at-risk for dropping out. The school is co-sponsored by the Occupational Center of Hudson County (OCHC) and a group of parents and educators. The overall goals of the school include providing an opportunity for occupational education on an elementary school level and providing a curriculum that combines academic and practical skill enhancement. All subjects will stress the development of job-related skills. The program of study includes a community service component and a job-skills/life-skills component. Each class has a year-long project involving the creation of an entrepreneurial opportunity to be run using sound business and economic planning.

FACILITY

The Gateway School is centrally located in Jersey City, New Jersey and is accessible by both public and private transportation. The school shares a building with the Occupational Center of Hudson County (OCHC). The areas of the building used for school programs are a common room on the ground floor and two classrooms on the second level, as well as administrative office space.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

When creating the curriculum, the school used the New Jersey Core Curriculum Standards to provide guidelines. The school stated its intention to review the curriculum on an ongoing basis. The school was founded on the idea of "offering a holistic Middle School program which would integrate vocational training with the more traditional academic curriculum."

GOVERNANCE

The board of trustees is comprised of the original founders of the school and includes two parents, two teachers, and two members from the local community.

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Jersey City Community Charter School

Sponsoring District: Jersey City School District

LOCATION	JERSEY CITY, HUDSON COUNTY (URBAN)
ENROLLMENT	61
FACULTY	7
GRADE LEVELS	KINDERGARTEN, 9TH THROUGH 12TH

STUDENT PROFILE

Black: 82% Hispanic: 15% White: 3%
Free lunch eligibility: 100% (61 students)

MISSION

The Urban League of Hudson County is the organization that founded Jersey City Community Charter School (JCCCS). In doing so, they seek to serve at-risk students from the inner city by providing a solid and personalized education. The mission of JCCCS is to develop lifelong learning skills and to facilitate the student's ability to make responsible decisions. The school is committed to implementing a learning environment that addresses the full range of students' alternative learning styles.

FACILITY

JCCCS is located in Jersey City, New Jersey. The elementary school is temporarily located inside a small, unused church. Kindergarten classrooms are on two floors in the rear of the church. Students eat lunch in the classrooms and visit a nearby park for recess.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The education at JCCCS is modeled after the New Jersey Core Curriculum Standards. The educational philosophy of the school is one of inclusion, which is reflected in a commitment to maximizing the mainstreaming of all students. All teachers are aided by teaching assistants, most of whom are connected with AmeriCorps.

GOVERNANCE

There is a twenty-two member board of trustees made up of one JCCCS teacher, four members of the Urban League staff, three business sector representative, ten parents and/or community representatives, three educators, and one student. At the moment, a temporary director is responsible for the daily administration of the school.

LEAP Charter School

Sponsoring District: Camden School District

LOCATION	CAMDEN, CAMDEN COUNTY (URBAN)
ENROLLMENT	324
FACULTY	19
GRADE LEVEL	KINDERGARTEN THROUGH 5TH

STUDENT PROFILE

Black: 50% Hispanic: 50%
Free lunch eligibility: not reported

MISSION

The primary educational goal of the Project LEAP Academy Charter School is to allow students to begin their growth toward a productive, effective, and fulfilling adulthood. The school envisions children functioning effectively in and contributing to a world of new ideas; to think independently, critically, and creatively; to become collaborating members of a democratic society; and to become lifelong learners. All teachers, school personnel, and parents are viewed as continual learners and reformers in support of quality learning. The entire community serves as a 24-hour classroom and resource center with the Project LEAP Academy Charter School as the hub for lifelong learning for its members. Students of the Project LEAP Academy Charter School develop solid learning strategies, actively seek knowledge, thick critically, solve problems independently and with others, communicate effectively, and interact socially. Graduates of the academy will view themselves as important, contributing members of a community, hope for the continual improvement of that community, and play a role in that improvement.

FACILITY

The school is in a temporary site consisting of classrooms in trailers connected by a wooden boardwalk.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

LEAP's schedule includes an 11-month calendar with school beginning at 8:00 a.m. and ending at 5:00 p.m. each day. Six hours per day are spent in classroom activities and three hours per day are set aside for enrichment. Students are placed in multi-aged groups that will be taught by the same teacher for both years, and may range in age from seven to nine years old. LEAP Academy works in conjunction with Rutgers University. The school's curriculum overlaps and encompasses the New Jersey Core Curriculum Standards. The teachers do not use textbooks in their classes; however next year they hope to use some prepared supplementary materials. On the last Friday of each month, students do not attend classes, leaving teachers a day for professional development.

GOVERNANCE

The board of trustees consists of fifteen individuals. Three are Rutgers University faculty and/or staff, five are parents, and seven are public members selected from the corporate or philanthropic sectors and the broader Camden community. Trustees serve three year terms. Rutgers' faculty/staff may serve an unlimited number of terms; non-Rutgers' Board members may serve up to two consecutive terms.

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Learning Community Charter School

Sponsoring District: Jersey City School District

LOCATION	JERSEY CITY, HUDSON COUNTY (URBAN)
ENROLLMENT	98
FACULTY	7
GRADE LEVELS	KINDERGARTEN THROUGH 2ND

STUDENT PROFILE

Asian: 6% Black: 37% Hispanic: 24% White: 32% Other: 1%
Free lunch eligibility: 42% (41 students)

MISSION

The Learning Community Charter School recognizes that the habits of tolerance, thoughtful debate, and community involvement are essential for democracy to flourish, but are not innate. In fact they must be taught, exercised, and owned. In partnership with community institutions throughout Jersey City, we will teach students drawn from the racial, ethnic, and economic diversity of our school district to be thoughtful, active, and successful citizens in the interdependent world of the 21st Century. Our students will leave the Community Charter School capable of understanding, practicing, and embracing the principles and habits of democracy, and able to prosper in the rapidly changing and technologically advanced global economy.

FACILITY

Learning Community shares a building with the Boy's and Girl's Club, and has use of some of these facilities. There are two classrooms per grade.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Learning Community seeks to provide a cooperative, thematic, and participatory education for its students. The day includes time for students to follow their individual interests, as well as activities that foster active engagement and student ownership.

GOVERNANCE

The Governing Council consists of three parent representatives, three community members, and for the first three years of operation, three founders, for a total of nine members. The director is responsible for the daily operation of the school.

North Star Academy Charter School of Newark

Sponsoring District: Newark School District

LOCATION	NEWARK, ESSEX COUNTY (URBAN)
ENROLLMENT	72
FACULTY	8
GRADE LEVELS	5TH AND 6TH

STUDENT PROFILE

Black: 94% Hispanic: 6%
Free lunch eligibility: 89% (64 students)

MISSION

The North Star Academy Charter School serves Newark children by building an uncommon school where students partake of a rigorous 11 month, extended day academic program that gives them the means to succeed in school and life.

To shape an intimate, supportive, engaging school community where classes are small and personalized; where parents are partners; where teachers teach with passion and commitment; and where all the adults model and the students develop and live the values of caring, respect, honesty, justice, and self-discipline.

To generate for students a transforming experience at an age when they are forging their very identities and lifetime aspirations; and to cultivate in them the belief that they are the master of their own destinies: each one worthy of greatness and goodness, each one capable of – and responsible for – serving the community and world around them.

FACILITY

North Star Academy is located in a former office building acquired from the First Union Bank by the New Community Corporation [a Newark-based nonprofit organization] through a sealed bid process. The school is newly renovated and contains more than 20,000 square feet of usable space. North Star Academy has three floors with ten classrooms and two computer labs. The school's central location allows the local YWCA, the Newark Museum, and the New Jersey Performing Arts Center to be used as satellite learning centers for the students.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The school follows an academic curriculum based on the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards. North Star Academy teachers work collaboratively to: design two hour interdisciplinary classes; develop performance based assessments; engage students in an active learning process; integrate technology into classwork; serve as four year advisors to a small group of students; and guide students in community service projects. The school has an extended school day and an eleven month school year. Parental involvement is facilitated through a family service coordinator and formalized via a signed covenant between parents and the school.

GOVERNANCE

The initial design of school's board of trustees calls for a seven-member board consisting of two parents, one at-large member, one investor-stakeholder, one university educator, one community leader and one business leader, and a co-director of the school.

Princeton Charter School

Sponsoring District: Princeton Regional School District

LOCATION	PRINCETON TOWNSHIP, MERCER COUNTY (SUBURBAN?)
ENROLLMENT	71
FACULTY	5
GRADE LEVELS	4TH, 5TH AND 6TH

STUDENT PROFILE

Asian: 7% Black: 7% Hispanic: 10% White: 76%
Free lunch eligibility: 10% (7 students)

MISSION

The Princeton Charter School (PCS) provides a focused education in an atmosphere that affirms academic achievement. The PCS believes in a "thorough and efficient" education attained through a rigorous curriculum that requires mastery of core knowledge and skills. The objectives emphasize rigor, teaching that is challenging, integrated formal assessments, communication with parents, and an atmosphere that encourages academic achievement.

FACILITY

The Princeton Charter School is located off a main thoroughfare in a former three-story office building, surrounded with trees, a play area, and large parking lot. An anteroom and Director's office serve as the main school office area. There is a teachers' lounge, sick room, and computer room with bookshelves for the library. Individual classroom desks are in rows and face a blackboard. Classroom decorations and bulletin boards contain posters and pictures that pertain to the academic subject. The all-purpose room has desks for class space, lunch, and the after school program.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The PCS curriculum emphasizes a "back to basics" approach, which emphasizes rigor and the accelerated coverage of subjects that address many elements of the New Jersey Core Curriculum Standards.

The instructional approach emphasizes homework review, classroom assignment completion, and discussion relevant to the lesson. The educational program reflects a mix of teaching styles from lecture and discussion to class participation in reading aloud, to active problem solving. Computers are used primarily for teaching keyboarding skills or using informational CD-ROM for research reports.

GOVERNANCE

Nine members comprise the board of trustees of which a majority must be parents. The PCS founders elected the initial board of trustees. Board members espouse a "hands-on" approach and are involved in all aspects of the school from financing and renovation to business management, curriculum design and the selection of educational materials. The director and a full-time secretary manage the school's day to day operations. The treasurer of the board of trustees manages the school's fiscal affairs.

Robert Treat Academy Charter School Inc.

Sponsoring District: Newark School District

LOCATION	NEWARK, ESSEX COUNTY (URBAN)
ENROLLMENT	100
FACULTY	13
GRADE LEVELS	KINDERGARTEN THROUGH 2ND

STUDENT PROFILE

Black: 16% Hispanic: 79% White: 5%
Free/reduced lunch eligibility: 66% (66 students)

MISSION

The Robert Treat Academy (RTA) charter school is characterized by its total commitment to high academic achievement, socially acceptable behavior and a recognition that all individuals are created equal and must be given equal educational opportunity.

FACILITY

The Robert Treat Academy charter school is housed in a newly renovated building that was once a church. The building is leased to RTA by the North Ward Center of Newark, the school's parent company. Excavation and construction are currently under way to accommodate the school's expansion next year.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The school follows an academic curriculum that builds upon the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards. This curriculum is structured with an emphasis on reading, writing and speaking in all content and special areas. The school provides a seven hour academic day, and an eleven month academic year. Computer-assisted instruction is a hallmark of the program, with students having access to computers at school and, when resources permit, at home.

GOVERNANCE

15 trustees sit on the board of directors, which is comprised of four parents and eleven community-based trustees. The board deals with policy-level decision making while an interim headmaster runs the day to day affairs of the school. Business matters are handled in a subcommittee comprised of the chairman of the board of directors, a board member who works as a day-to-day fiscal administrator in the school, and the fiscal officer of the parent company.

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Samuel Dewitt Proctor Academy Charter School

Sponsoring District: Ewing Township School District

LOCATION	EWING TOWNSHIP, MERCER COUNTY (RURAL)
ENROLLMENT	49
FACULTY	6
GRADE LEVELS	7TH AND 8TH

STUDENT PROFILE

Black: 92% Hispanic: 6% White: 2%
Free lunch eligibility: 68% (32 students)

MISSION

The Academy's mission is to create a nurturing and challenging atmosphere in which students in grades seven through 12 will acquire the knowledge and discipline that they need to prepare them for college and productive and fulfilling lives beyond school. Founded on the high expectations of academic achievement, the importance of family and friendships, and the responsibility each student has to the school and the greater community, the school believes students can develop their talents fully with a demanding curriculum, a warm and supportive staff, and a structured residential life. An Academy education includes developing strong character and a sense of responsibility and caring. Family, guardians, and mentors are an integral part of the academy program. Our students learn to be good neighbors by joining with the local community in public service projects. Our commitment to our students is lifelong and the Academy will serve as a source of advice and assistance after graduation and throughout their lives.

FACILITY

The Samuel DeWitt Proctor Academy Charter School, located in Ewing Township, leases a building from the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf. The Katzenbach School is a mixture of brick buildings built in the 1920s and more modern buildings built in the 1960s. Proctor Academy occupies the Clock Tower Building, which dates from the 1920s. The facility features six classrooms, a community room, an expanding media center, a community room that doubles as the lunch room, the main office and the director's office. In addition, 48 students live in two dormitories monitored by six residential advisors and a director of residential life.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Proctor Academy's curriculum is aligned with the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards and emphasizes a variety of instructional approaches including group projects, performances and the Socratic method. The school uses performance-based assessments along with standardized tests. The school is residential, with students boarding throughout the week and returning to their homes on weekends.

GOVERNANCE

The board of trustees consists of nine members. The Academy was founded in partnership with the non-profit corporation Children's Academies for Achievement (CAA), which holds four seats on the board. The board is responsible for policy-level decisions and the fiscal management of the school. In addition to the director, who manages day-to-day operations, a director of residence life and a part-time business administrator also assist in the administration of the school.

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Soaring Heights Charter School

Sponsoring District: Jersey City School District

LOCATION	JERSEY CITY, HUDSON COUNTY (URBAN)
ENROLLMENT	85
FACULTY	9
GRADE LEVELS	KINDERGARTEN THROUGH 4TH

STUDENT PROFILE

Asian: 7% Black: 49% Hispanic: 29% White: 14%
Free lunch eligibility: 81% (69 students)

MISSION

The central focus of the Soaring Heights' mission is communication. This means improving communication among teachers, which builds collegiality, and reaching compromises if disagreements arise. It also means improving teacher/student communication. The respect for others and openness that this mission provides permeates not only the behavior of the teachers, but the student body as well. The goal of the school is to equip children with the capacity to communicate and listen more effectively, skills which will provide them with better school experiences and the ability to sustain relationships through all facets of their adult lives.

FACILITY

Soaring Heights is located in Jersey City, New Jersey. The school is currently located in a temporary site, although the board of trustees is searching for a new site and plans to move in a year's time. A small church congregation also shares the building. The site is a modern two-story building with carpeted hallways and buzzer security at the entrance. A Kindergarten is located on the first floor, and first through fourth grades are in classrooms on the second floor. An adjoining parking lot serves as a playground for the students.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The school-year calendar mirrors that of the public schools in the district as does the length of the school day. Soaring Heights' teachers follow a standard core curriculum modeled after the New Jersey Core Curriculum Standards. Students who need extra help leave their classes and work in small groups. Several classrooms are divided by sliding partitions, which allow teachers to join their classes together for student interaction during lunch. Teachers and parent-volunteers offer their time after school several afternoons a week for tutoring. Teachers also assist the director and attend board meetings. All teachers at Soaring Heights are members of the Jersey City Education Association.

GOVERNANCE

A thirteen member board of trustees is the main governing body of the school. Four permanent seats are allocated to members with at least three years communication training. Minority representation is also sought to ensure diverse cultural input. In addition, a member of the Jersey City Education Association holds a permanent seat on the board. No board member represents private entities.

Sussex County Charter School for Technology

Sponsoring District: Sparta County School District

LOCATION	SPARTA, SUSSEX COUNTY (RURAL)
ENROLLMENT	50
FACULTY	4
GRADE LEVELS	7TH AND 8TH

STUDENT PROFILE

Hispanic: 2% White: 98%
Free lunch eligibility: 6% (3 students)

MISSION

Sussex County Charter School for Technology (SCCST) seeks to provide an educational environment that will enhance academic learning opportunities through the integrated use of available technologies. A program structured around small class size, a dynamic and integrated curriculum aligned with the NJ Core Curriculum Content Standards, and the infusion of technology serves to stimulate student enthusiasm and interest in the learning process. Students have the opportunity to become active learners through the practical application of concepts and theories discussed in each of the academic areas. This practical application provides students with an opportunity to experience their learning. This program provides for a structured learning experience that emphasizes the development of the adolescent learner, promotes social and emotional maturity, and provides the skills needed for a smooth transition from the elementary phase of the educational process to the secondary phase and eventually to the world of work.

FACILITY

The Sussex County Charter School is located in Sparta County. It is housed within the Sparta Middle School and is across the street from the Sparta High School for Technology. The two schools share technology teachers.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

SCCST students come from eight different districts to the Sussex County Charter School, and most students came to school by bus. The school's curriculum reflects a strong emphasis on technology. There are technology classes that each student must take integrated with core disciplines and each student is provided with a laptop computer when they enroll. They are taught various programming languages and given instruction regarding the use of a wide variety of applications.

GOVERNANCE

The board of trustees for the Sussex County Charter School for Technology is composed of five voting members, with the Principal and the Educational Consultant serving in the capacity of ex officio members. The composition of the board of trustees reflects a cross section of the surrounding community: business people, parents, school board members, and educators. Two board members, one from the Sparta School District and one from the Sussex County Technical School, reflect the partnership between the charter school and the local educational district.

Trenton Community Charter School

Sponsoring District: Trenton School District

LOCATION	TRENTON, MERCER COUNTY (URBAN)
ENROLLMENT	150
FACULTY	11
GRADE LEVELS	KINDERGARTEN THROUGH 3RD

STUDENT PROFILE

Black: 98% Hispanic: 1% White: 1%
Free/reduced lunch eligibility: 61% (92 students)

MISSION

Trenton Community Charter School (TCCS) provides a family centered education for children in kindergarten through third grade. The school's staff and parents have developed curriculum standards that define what students should know and be able to do in order to be productive citizens. The philosophy of the school is that all children can and will learn when provided with the proper environment, stimuli, and support.

FACILITY

The Trenton Community Charter School is located in Trenton, New Jersey. The school leases space from the Young Scholars Institute (YSI), a non-profit organization which provides after-school tutoring and enrichment programs for kids in grades 2 through 12. The YSI and the TCCS are temporarily housed in a converted mansion. The school consists of a mix of classrooms and offices, as well as a sitting room with a fireplace and mahogany split staircase, which gives it a residential feel. A playground extends from one side of the building and a parking lot doubles as additional recreational space.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The Trenton Community Charter School has designed its curriculum to mirror the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards. The school's mission emphasizes a concentration in math, science, and technology, and recently installed computers providing Internet access. A half hour period is devoted to silent reading each day. Students in all grades learn Spanish.

GOVERNANCE

A nine member board governs the Trenton Community Charter School. The board is composed of two educators, two parents, one attorney, one accountant, one founder, and two other members of the local community. A part-time executive director reports directly to the board and is responsible for strategic decisions such as staffing, budgeting, and fund raising. The director and a full-time assistant manage the school day to day.

Appendix A

History of the Charter School Concept

In 1983 The National Commission on Education reported that "our nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, and technological innovation is being taken over by competitors throughout the world." The report concluded that the imminent peril predicted for the country was a result of a public education system that was inadequate and in need of changes – an inference that focused the nation's attention squarely on educational reform.

One reform theory that emerged in the wake of *A Nation at Risk* was "school choice" – the ability for parents and students to pick a school which best served their needs from a variety of educational options. In California, the Learning Alternatives Resource Network (LEARN) developed legislation in 1985 calling for school choice within the public school system. This bill would have allowed teachers and parents to create a new public school if at least thirty parents signalled commitment to enroll their children. While never enacted into law, this seminal bill gave rise to the charter school concept.

The term "charter" first appears in the language of educational reform in *Education by Charter*, a 1988 book by educator Ray Budde. He envisioned an educational system in which school districts granted charter agreements to teachers who wished to create new curriculum. Fashioned loosely after the contracts granted to early explorers by trading companies, these charters would include elements of exploration, risk taking, and competition. After strategies and plans were approved, these teachers would be given the necessary supplies and a specific time frame to achieve the goals articulated in the agreement. They would then be held accountable to the school district, with the renewal or revocation of the charter based on an evaluation of their performance by an outside agency.

Joe Nathan, a former public school teacher and administrator who now directs the Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, expanded upon Budde's original thinking. In his 1996 book *Charter Schools – Creating Hope and Opportunity for American Educators*, Nathan proposed that, "The charter school movement attempts to promote widespread improvements in public education both by allowing people to create new kinds of schools and by encouraging existing school systems to improve in order to compete effectively with these new schools."

Spurred along by the reform movement, the charter school concept transitioned relatively quickly from educational theory to public policy. In 1988, Sy Fliegel, an innovative educator from East Harlem who had created a teacher-run school, and Albert Shanker, then the President of the American Federation of Teachers, were invited to speak at an education conference sponsored by a Minneapolis foundation. It was here that Shanker supported Fliegel's ideas concerning charter schools and their role in school reform. Inspired by this endorsement, Minnesota State Senator Ember Reicghott Junge (D) proposed the charter concept to the Minnesota Legislature, and a citizen's league was created to study the charter school concept. Their work eventually defined the charter school concept as:

1. Opportunities for educators to create new public schools, thus carrying out true empowerment.
2. Reduced reliance on rules and regulations in exchange for educators accepting responsibility for increased student achievement.
3. Use of the central ideas of public education: equal access, nonsectarian curriculum, no tuition charged, and no admissions test.
4. Permitting more than one agency to offer public education.
5. Choice and options for educators, parents, and students.

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The result of this research led to the development of the first charter school legislation, passed in Minnesota in 1991. Since then, 33 states and the District of Columbia have approved Charter School Legislation, with approximately 786 charter schools in operation nationwide.[1] It is important to note that each of these states have different legislation that governs and defines the role of charter schools within the public education system, which has created a wide spectrum of charter schools.

NEW JERSEY'S CHARTER SCHOOL LEGISLATION.
New Jersey's charter school legislation grew out of a complaint filed in 1970 on behalf of an eleven-year-old Jersey City child. This lawsuit, Robinson vs. Cahill, brought the equity of the school financing system under question and stimulated the Legislature's interest in school reform. The court ruled in favor of the plaintiff and [as a result, the legislature] passed the Public School Act of 1975, known as the Thorough and Efficient Education Act. The legislature also authorized the first State income tax levy to raise revenue in support of this act.

In 1981 another suit, Abbott vs. Burke, was filed to challenge the 1975 act, stating that it was in violation of the education clause of the State constitution. Then-Governor Florio began work on a new school funding formula, which became the Quality Education Act of 1991. This act, which raised taxes significantly, was later amended but remained unpopular with voters. According to New Jersey State Assemblyman Joe Doria (D), "The struggle over financing had produced a byproduct – a growing interest in school choice, the development and selection of publicly funded alternatives to the current education system."

Assemblyman Doria introduced Assembly Bill No. 584, known as the "School Freedom of Choice Act" in 1991. This bill, which has not been passed, contains a proposal for a voucher system – a school-choice option that allows public funds to pay for private school tuition. On January 1, 1994, assemblyman Doria contacted the Office of Legislative Services to develop a new bill, A-592, which proposed charter school legislation. Chairman of the Assembly Education Committee, John Rocco (R), co-sponsored the bill.

Both legislators met with the President of the New Jersey Education Association, which was strongly opposed to the voucher system. Meetings were also scheduled with the New Jersey School Boards Association, the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association, the New Jersey Association of School Administrators, and the Department of Education. After much discussion and alteration, the bill cleared the Assembly in June 1995 and moved to the Senate. During this same period, the New Jersey Department of Education published the Strategic Plan for the Systemic Improvement of Education in New Jersey to coincide with the state improvement plan under the federal Goals 2000/Educate America Act. One of the goals of this plan was to create models of educational innovation by establishing charter schools in each of state-operated school districts.

Senator Jack Ewing (R), Chairman of the Senate Education Committee, had also introduced a charter school bill, and later joined Assemblymen Doria and Rocco once A-592 was transferred to the Senate. The Governor's Office became involved and a compromise bill was referred to the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee. The bill worked its way through the legislative process and eventually received the necessary votes in the Senate. In January 11, 1996, Governor Whitman enacted the nation's twentieth charter law, the Charter School Program Act (L. 1995, c. 426, N.J.S.A. 18A: 36A), at the end of her State of the State address.

1 Center for Educational Reform

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Appendix B

Interview Protocols

STUDENTS

Hello, I am <NAME>. I am a researcher from Teachers College, studying your school. We are interested in hearing what students have to say about charter schools, which is why we wanted to meet with you today. We just have a few questions for you and we would appreciate your honest response. Your name will be kept confidential which means that when we talk about your answers, we won't give your name. Are you ready?

1. Whose decision was it to come to the school? <parent/guardian? student?>
2. Why did you pick this school?
3. What's different about this school than the school you attended last year?
4. Describe 3 ways this school is better than your last one. <If older than kindergarten>
5. Describe 3 ways this school is not as good as the school you attended last year. <If older than kindergarten>
6. Do you do any schoolwork at home? < how much? how much time-on-task? >
7. Do you plan to come back next year? < why? why not? >
8. Is there anything you would like to tell me about your school?

PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Hello, I am <NAME>. I'm a member of a research team from Teachers College, Columbia University that is studying charter schools in New Jersey. In order to get a complete picture of the work that charter schools are doing, we want to talk to everyone affected by them, including parents. Your name and phone number were provided by <DIRECTOR'S NAME>, and he/she is aware of the study and is cooperating fully. We value your honest input, which includes both the negative and positive aspects of your child's school. If you don't understand a question, please let me know so I can explain it further. All individual responses will be held confidential and only group data will be shared. At the end of the survey, I will answer any questions you may have about the study. Are you ready to begin?

1. How many school-aged children live in your household?
2. Do they attend public, private or religious school?
3. What grade level(s)?
4. What age and grade level is the child enrolled in <CHARTER SCHOOL>?
5. Was your child enrolled in school last year? Where?
6. Why did you enroll your child in <CHARTER SCHOOL>?
7. How did you hear about <CHARTER SCHOOL>?
8. What other choices did you consider?
9. What is the focus/special purpose of your child's school?
10. How is the school accomplishing this focus/special purpose?
11. Do you feel that the school is working for your child? <What do you base your answer on?>
12. Do you feel your child is academically challenged by this school?
    <Is your child learning? How do you know?>
13. What do you like about <CHARTER SCHOOL>?
14. What would you change about this school?
15. How many school-related events have you participated in? < type? time? >
16. Will you re-enroll your child in this school next year? < why? why not? >
17. Is there anything you would like to tell me about <CHARTER SCHOOL>?

Do you have any questions for me?

FACULTY

Hi, I'm <NAME,> from the Teachers College Research Team. As <DIRECTOR'S NAME> probably told you, we are working on a research project studying charter schools in New Jersey. As a teacher at <CHARTER SCHOOl> you have a great deal of valuable information and insights, so we are especially interested in your perspective. Our hope is to have a truly representative study, and we value your honest input, which includes both the positive and negative aspects of working here. If you don't understand a question, please let me know so I can explain it further. All individual responses will be held confidential and only group data will be shared. At the end of the survey, I will answer any questions you may have about the study. Are you ready to begin?

1. Why did you choose to work here?
2. Are there professional advantages to working at <CHARTER SCHOOL>? < what are they?>
3. Are there professional disadvantages to working at <CHARTER SCHOOL>? <what are they?>
4. What is the mission of your school?
5. How does this mission shape what you do in the classroom and in the school? <examples/ evidence>
6. How do you assess that the mission is being successfully realized?
7. What do you like about this school?
8. What would you change about the school?
9. In your experience, what type of student benefits most from attending <CHARTER SCHOOL>? <why?>
10. In what ways are parents involved in the school? <type of involvement? amount of time spent?>
11. We are interested in your workday, and where you work. Please describe how many hours per week you spend in school, as well as the time you spend working at home:
12. How involved are you in decisions at your school regarding:
    * curriculum design/development?
    * school policy, rules and regulations?
    * budgeting?
    * staffing?
    * community relations?
13. Are you familiar with the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards? <Y/ N>
14. How do the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards affect your practice?
15. How do standardized tests affect your practice?
16. What types of assessment do you use in your classroom? <formal/informal>
17. Are there specific performance goals set for the school? <school-specific goals from charter>
18. What are these specific performance goals?
19. How are these specific performance goals measured?

20. How would you suggest that charter schools be assessed by the state?

21. What experience or skill has been most useful for teaching in this school?

22. What advice would you give to teachers interested in working in a charter school?

23. Do you plan to return to this school next year? <why? why not?>

24. Is there anything you would like to tell me about <CHARTER SCHOOL>?

Do you have questions for me?

LOCAL EDUCATIONAL DISTRICT

Hello, I am <NAME,> a member of the Teachers College Research Group working on a study of the thirteen charter schools in New Jersey, including <CHARTER SCHOOL.> Our hope is to have a truly representative study of <CHARTER SCHOOL> and we value your honest input, which includes both the positive and negative aspects of the school. If you don't understand a question, please let me know so I can explain it further. All individual responses will be held confidential and only group data will be shared. At the end of the survey, I will answer any questions you may have about the study. Are you ready to begin?

1. How is <CHARTER SCHOOL> different than the other schools in your district?
2. In what way are you involved with the charter school in your district?
3. Is the <CHARTER SCHOOL> useful to your district in any way?
4. What would you change about the charter schools in your district?
5. How has <CHARTER SCHOOL> influenced the district with regard to:
    - Funding?
    - Curriculum?
    - Teaching?
    - Administration?
    - Staffing?
    - Relationship with local community?
6. Why is there a demand for a charter school in your district?
7. How should charter schools be assessed by the state?
8. What are some of the advantages of the charter school concept?
9. What are some of the disadvantages of the charter school concept?
10. What should the New Jersey State Legislature know about charter schools?
11. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about <CHARTER SCHOOL> or the charter school concept?

Do you have any questions for me?

FOUNDERS

Hello, I am <NAME>. As <DIRECTOR'S NAME> may have mentioned, Teacher's College is working on a study of the thirteen charter schools in New Jersey. As a founder of <CHARTER SCHOOL> you have valuable insights and knowledge which is important to this study. We value your honest input, which includes both the positive and negative aspects of the school. If you don't understand a question, please let me know so I can explain it further. All individual responses will be held confidential and only group data will be shared. At the end of the survey, I will answer any questions you may have about the study. Are you ready to begin?

1. Why did you found this school?
2. What do you like about the school?
3. What would you change about the school?
4. In what ways do you remain active in the school?
5. How involved are you in decisions at your school regarding:
    * curriculum design/development?
    * school policy, rules and regulations?
    * budgeting?
    * staffing?
    * public relations, external perceptions of the school?
6. What main lesson did you learn during:
    * application phase? <application through approval>
    * start-up phase? <approval through first day of school>
    * operation? <first day on>
7. What kinds of professional expertise was needed during each of these phases:
    * application phase? <application through approval>
    * start-up phase? <approval through first day of school>
    * operation? <first day on>
8. Who provided this help? <how did you secure this help?>
9. Who is responsible for managing the school's current finances?
10. How has the mission of your school changed since the application?
11. Are there specific performance goals set for the school? <as defined by charter>
12. What are these specific performance goals?
13. How are these specific performance goals assessed?

14. Describe the relationship between the school and the local:

    * School District.

    * Community.

    * Media.

15. Describe the relationship between the founders and:

    * the board of trustees.

    * the parents.

    * the director of the school.

16. How was the director selected?

17. How would you suggest that charter schools be assessed?

18. What should the New Jersey State Legislature know about charter schools?

19. Is there anything you would like to tell me about <CHARTER SCHOOL>?

Do you have any questions for me?

DIRECTORS

We are engaged in a study of <CHARTER SCHOOL> and I am going to ask you some questions about it. Our hope is to have a truly representative study of <CHARTER SCHOOL> and we value your honest input, which includes both the positive and negative aspects of the school. If you don't understand a question, please let me know so I can explain it further. All individual responses will be held confidential and only group data will be shared. At the end of the survey, I will answer any questions you may have about the study. Are you ready to begin?

1. Why did you chose to work here?
2. Are there professional advantages to working at <CHARTER SCHOOL>? <what are they?>
3. Are there professional disadvantages to working at <CHARTER SCHOOL>? <what are they?>
4. Do you plan to return to this school next year? <why? why not?>
5. What do you like about the school?
6. What would you change about the school?
7. What are two critical pieces of advice you would give to others directing/administrating charter schools?
8. What main lesson did you learn during:
    * application phase? <application through approval>
    * start-up phase? <approval through first day of school>
    * operation? <first day on>
9. What kinds of professional expertise was needed during each of these phases:
    * application phase? <application through approval>
    * start-up phase? <approval through first day of school>
    * operation? <first day on>
10. Who provided this help? <how did you secure this help?>
11. What is your school's most pressing need?
12. Please give three examples where the school's mission guides your practice < examples/ evidence >
13. How do the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards affect what you do at <CHARTER SCHOOL> ?
14. Are there specific performance goals set for the school?
    * What are they?
    * How are they measured?
15. Is the curriculum continually revised and assessed? <how? by whom? what is the process?>
16. How is academic rigor defined in your school? <examples>
17. What criteria did you use in hiring teachers?
18. What criteria would you use in hiring new teachers?

19. In what ways are parents involved in the school < type and time > ?

20. Describe the relationship between the school and the:

    * Local Educational District.

    * Local community.

    * Media.

21. Describe your relationship with:

    * the founders of the school

    * the board of trustees

    * the parents

22. How would you suggest that the state assess charter schools? <PROBE-Examples>

23. Have you sought waivers from the administrative code? Which sections? Why? Why not?

24. What should the New Jersey State Legislature know about charter schools?

25. Is there anything you would like to tell us about <CHARTER SCHOOL>?

TRUSTEES

Hello, I am <NAME>. As <DIRECTOR'S NAME> may have mentioned, Teacher's College is working on a study of the thirteen charter schools in New Jersey. As a trustee of <CHARTER SCHOOL> you have valuable insights and knowledge which is important to this study. We value your honest input, which includes both the positive and negative aspects of the school. If you don't understand a question, please let me know so I can explain it further. All individual responses will be held confidential and only group data will be shared. At the end of the survey, I will answer any questions you may have about the study. Are you ready to begin?

1. Why have you accepted a trustee position at <CHARTER SCHOOL>?
2. Please define your role and duties as a trustee of <CHARTER SCHOOL>?
3. How often does the whole board meet?
4. How long do these meetings typically take? <time per meeting?>
5. Are there sub-committees? <what are they?>
6. How often do these committees meet?
7. Has there been some form of training for board members? <what? when?>
8. Please tell us about a recent decision the board has made and describe the process involved in reaching this decision.
9. What is your school's most pressing needs? <single greatest challenge>?
10. Have there been any changes in the board's composition since the charter approval? <what? why?>
11. Describe the relationship between the board of trustees and the:
    * Director/Head of School.
    * Local Educational District.
    * Local Community.
    * Media.
12. Is the board actively recruiting trustees? (why? why not?)
13. What criteria do you use in selecting new trustees?
14. What advice would you give to a prospective trustee about being on the board?
15. What advice would you give other charter school founders about boards?
16. What advice would you give other charter schools in selecting directors?
17. How long do you plan to continue serving as a trustee of <CHARTER SCHOOL>?
18. What should the New Jersey Legislature know about charter schools?
19. Is there anything you want to tell me about <CHARTER SCHOOL>?

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Appendix C

Site Visit Protocol

ARRIVAL AND OPENING

1. How do students get to school? (subway, bus, car, carpool, walking, bike?)
2. What is the policy and practice for children who arrive early?
    * How early do they arrive?
    * Is there adult supervision?
    * Is there a school breakfast program?
3. Describe the schools arrival ritual (tone, atmosphere).

FACILITY AND ARCHITECTURE

4. Is the school's exterior. . .
    * clean?
    * marked with clear signage?
    * marked with evidence of the schools mission?
5. Is the school's interior. . . .
    * clean?
    * safe?
6. Physical characteristics
    * furniture

LUNCH

7. Describe the lunch routine (set-up, procedure, special rituals, adult presence, etc.).
8. How do students behave during lunch?

INFORMAL INTERACTIONS

9. Student-Student
    * smiling?
    * courtesy/politeness/respect?
    * yelling/screaming?
    * cursing?

10. Adult-Student

    * nature (discipline, social, work-related)?
    * know their names?
    * smiling? direct eye contact?
    * openness, comfort?
    * courtesy, politeness?
    * patience for individual conversations?
    * specific evidence of (school specific) mission?

11. Adult-Adult

    * professional discourse?
    * casual discourse?

SUPPORT STAFF

12. What support staff members are visible in the school?
13. (How) does staff work tie into the schools mission?
14. How do staff members respond to the following questions:

    * What is the mission of the school?
    * What do you like about working here?
    * What would you change about this work environment?

END OF DAY/DEPARTURE

15. How is the end of the day indicated/ritualized?
16. What is the policy/practice for students who stay late?

    * How many students stay how long?
    * Describe any organized after-school activities.

17. What do teachers do after school?

    * work in classroom?
    * meet with individual students?
    * meet with groups of students?
    * meet with other teachers?
    * meet with parents?
    * leave the building?

Appendix D

Demographic Survey

STUDENTS

Number of students currently enrolled:

Number of students who have left school:

Average per-pupil funding:

Number of students eligible for Free/Reduced lunch:

Number of students with Individual Education Plan (IEP) on File:

Current student-to-teacher ratio:

Racial mix of school (Percentages as reported on the NJ Schools Report Card):

FACULTY

Number of faculty:

Number of faculty with less than 3 years of professional experience:

Number of faculty with more than 3 years professional experience:

Number of faculty pursuing alternative route to New Jersey teacher certification:

Number of faculty with bachelors degrees:

Number of faculty with masters degrees:

Number of faculty with degrees other than Education:

Number of faculty teaching out of field:

Median faculty salary:

Total number of faculty sick days for 1997-98 school year:

LOTTERY

Number of students in lottery:

Number of students accepted:

Number of students wait-listed:

Number of students who declined enrollment:

Please briefly describe the lottery protocol you used:

Please briefly describe how the lottery was marketed:

Please briefly describe how the lottery results were communicated:

FUNDING

Other than state, local, and federal funding, how much money was raised prior to the acceptance of your charter?

From what sources?

Other than state, local, and federal funding, how much money was raised during the period of time between charter-acceptance and the first day of operation?

From what sources?

Other than state, local, and federal funding, how much money has been raised since the school has become operational?

From what sources?

Appendix E

Research Staff

Pearl Rock Kane is a professor in the department of Organization and Leadership at Teachers College, Columbia University. She has taught in public schools in New York City, Brookline, Massachusetts, and Wyandotte, Michigan, as well as a private school in New York City. Her extensive research has included à comparison of public and private school teachers in New Jersey and a book, *The First Year of Teaching: Real Life Stories from the Classroom.*

Diane Fellows has district level experience as Supervisor of Curriculum and Instruction and Principal in Franklin Lake, New Jersey, and Vice Principal in Saddle River School District, New Jersey. An alumnus of Teachers College, Columbia University, she is now working on her doctoral dissertation in Educational Administration at Fordham University. Diane has over thirty years experience in New Jersey's public schools. She began her career as a middle school French teacher in Pomona, New York.

Karen Gordon has a Masters of Public Health from Yale, a B.A. in Anthropology and History, and a high school teaching certificate from Connecticut College. She is the Director of Health Education at Princeton University Health Services and has over 20 years of experience in training, teaching, program evaluation, and design. From 1979-1990 she served as an adjunct faculty member in the Health Education department at Teachers College. There, she taught courses in health education, child and school health, and health of urban populations. She is currently a doctoral student at TC in the Division of Human Development. Karen has two children in New Jersey public schools, and is involved with the Health and Safety Committee of the Parent-Teacher Organization.

Christopher Lauricella is a Masters candidate enrolled in the department of Organization and Leadership at Teachers College, Columbia University. He holds a BA in Marketing, Management and Business Communications and a BS in Secondary English Education, both from the State University of New York at Oneonta. Prior to attending Teachers College, Chris taught high school English in Lake Placid, New York. He comes to the charter school project with a strong interest in school culture and community and hopes that the study will provide information on creating effective learning communities on a large scale.

After three years teaching middle school science in St. Louis, **Douglas Norry** is a full-time Masters candidate enrolled in the department of Organization and Leadership at Teachers College, Columbia University. Doug has a BA in Psychology and Geology from Amherst College and much experience with children in schools, summer camps, and after-school programs. His work at Teachers College has included a study of retention of teachers of color and an interview-based study of public relations practices in a Harlem high school.

Nicole Presber attended public schools in California, studied for a year in Paris, and majored in Political Science and French at Trinity College, Connecticut. She taught middle school French in Los Angeles and middle school humanities at the Town School in San Francisco. There, she served as a master teacher in the New Teacher Institute. Nicole's Masters coursework at Teachers College has centered on educational administration and school reform.

Carolyn Sloan is full-time doctoral student at Teachers College enrolled in the department of Organization and Leadership at Teachers College, Columbia University. After graduating from Washington University in St. Louis, she taught Math and Science in Atlanta for three years. She also has extensive experience as an wilderness guide for adolescents.

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Treloar Tredennick taught French for two years at St. James School in St. James, Maryland before enrolling in the Education Administration Masters Program in the department of Organization and Leadership at Teachers College, Columbia University. In addition to working on the charter school project, she and some of her colleagues are attempting to establish a non-profit organization for the revitalization of public school facilities in New York City.

Michael Ülkü-Steiner has taught high school Spanish and English for five years in Durham, North Carolina. He has a BA in Interdisciplinary Studies from UNC-Chapel Hill and a M.A.L.S from Duke University. As a Masters candidate enrolled in the department of Organization and Leadership at Teachers College, Columbia University, he has worked on several projects: linking independent and new charter schools, examining the public relations practices of a Catholic school in Harlem, and exploring effective community-building activities in schools.

An Ed.D. student in the department of Organization and Leadership at Teachers College, Columbia University, **Danielle Wilcox** is interested in educational reforms, such as the charter school movement, which affect urban communities. She has also participated in a Teachers College Study of schools' practices in recruiting, hiring, and retaining faculty of color. She has taught English in Washington, DC and Trenton, New Jersey.

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